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AUTHOR Dorman, Gayle
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ABSTRACT

This monograph describes the Middle Grades Assessment Program (MGAP), presents 11 case studies of schools implementing the program, and offers experience-based suggestions for school improvement. The MGAP provides an approach to school improvement that involves training staff to assess their school on nine criteria, an approach designed for effectiveness under a wide variety of school characteristics. Discussion in Chapter 1 focuses on reasons why MGAP is an effective approach to school improvement. Chapter 2 provides 11 case studies which depict the multitude of complex and sometimes elusive factors that shape schools' efforts to improve. To varying degrees, eight of the schools were successful in their improvement efforts. Three exhibited evidence of short-term and long-term improvements attributable to MGAP. In five of the schools, MGAP made significant contributions to short-term improvements, but the prognosis for long-term change was uncertain. The efforts of two schools to implement MGAP were thwarted by either personnel problems or poor management. One school did not complete the MGAP. Provided in Chapter 3 are eight guidelines for educational change and a discussion of aspects of school improvement, including serendipitous changes; improvement of school climate and instruction; reallocation of existing resources; linkages to district and state mandates; and staff development. (RH)

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IMPROVING MIDDLE-GRADE SCHOOLS

A FRAMEWORK FOR ACTION

GAYLE DORMAN

CENTER FOR EARLY ADOLESCENCE

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IMPROVING
MIDDLE-GRADE SCHOOLS

A FRAMEWORK FOR ACTION

GAYLE DORMAN
CENTER FOR EARLY ADOLESCENCE

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Leah M. Lefstein, acting director
Monica D. Jacoby, marketing and communications manager
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Foreword

For most adults, recollections about our own early adolescence or about our adult experiences with young adolescents reveal on the one hand a bit of pain or trauma, and on the other hand, some humor and fond memories as well. That's the way it is with early adolescence. It is a time of rapid development across many fronts: physical, intellectual, social, and emotional. This period of development is full of immaturity, isolation, humiliation, and awkwardness, just as it is full of maturity, recognition, belonging, and grace. In short, it is a period of extremes in our lives both within ourselves and with others. Indeed, some persons have described the period between 10 and 15 years of age as that of being someone and of being no one at the same time – and knowing it.

Aside from a number of knowledgeable individuals in many academic fields and, of course, in the intuitive good sense of many parents and some other adults, there are few institutions or agencies that have a solid understanding of early adolescent children. There are even fewer organizations that use such understanding in ways to help the rest of us – individually and collectively – better form and shape the services and programs we provide for young adolescents. One agency that does help us to understand, and consequently, to do better by these children, is the Center for Early Adolescence at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

The Center had its origin in the work of Dr. Joan Lipsitz, who, as a researcher at the Learning Institute of North Carolina in 1976, studied early adolescent youth and the various ways society was and was not serving them. The result was her now landmark book, *Growing Up Forgotten: A Review of Research and Programs Concerning Early Adolescence.* The book's title tells the story. We seemed neither to understand young adolescents nor to deal with them in ways that help them as they need to be helped. Since 1978, the Center has been a valuable source of information, a nerve center of study, and an assisting agency for persons in diverse disciplines and roles who want to promote the healthy development of 10- to 15-year-olds.

No area of service for the young adolescent has been assisted by the Center more than that of education, most particularly the schools in which children spend their early adolescent years. Whether they are found in upper elementary school grades or the junior high school (note how those labels are drawn – from below and from above) or, more recently, in middle schools, is of little moment. What is important is how well such schools are truly serving young adolescents in ways that are sensitive to and understanding of what those children are like and how they are developing on so many fronts and at so many varying rates.

Certainly we want these schools to fulfill their distinct mission; that is, we want them to be academically effective. But, surely, we also need them to be developmentally responsive if we are fully to serve these young people. Furthermore, physical, mental, and social realities strongly affect how anyone – and most assuredly a young adolescent – learns. In short, we need these schools to be so effective and responsive that their academic and developmental missions bolster one another, or better yet, are integrated one with the other.

It was this challenge that gave rise to a new effort at the Center for Early Adolescence, namely, the *Middle Grades Assessment Program*, better known as MGAP. Drawing on knowledge about learning and early adolescent development and factoring in what needs to be learned in the disciplines, Gayle Dorman of the Center and an expert advisory board of educators, advocates, and policy makers put together a new approach for guiding middle-grade schools to assess and improve themselves. After extensive field testing in 11 pilot schools, the MGAP instruments and manuals were revised and further refined to a point where today they are viable and valuable tools for helping middle-grade schools to become more academically productive and developmentally responsive.

This monograph is derived from the experience of MGAP. It could not have come along at a better time. Today, more than ever before, we realize the pivotal role played by the middle grades in the present and future education and well-being of American youth. For too long, the middle grades have been an extension of schooling for younger children or a watered-down form of the high school. Lacking a clear sense of identity, the middle grades

have not been effective as the bridge between primary and secondary schooling, nor have they been responsive to the development of young adolescents during these critical years of their lives.

By overlooking the junior high/middle school years, we have created a crack in the foundation of American education that threatens many healthy children across all backgrounds and abilities. Recent national reports about education, such as *Barriers to Excellence: Our Children at Risk* (prepared by the National Coalition of Advocates for Students), *Investing in Our Children: Business and the Schools* (a report of the Committee for Economic Development), and *Keeping the Options Open: Recommendations* (a report from the College Board's Commission on Precollege Guidance and Counseling), all underscore this problem. Moreover, there is increasing recognition that a major key to resolving the nation's dropout problem can be found in the middle grades.

We need to focus our attention on these grades and ensure that they have their own academic and developmental integrity. The Middle Grades Assessment Program offers a beginning to that end by providing a framework that empowers educators to take action to improve their schools. This monograph traces MGAP as a framework for action from its conceptual roots to its actual use in schools and on to the resulting lessons for improving middle-grade schools. As such, this publication should aid anyone who has a stake in American education. That's just about all of us.

I urge you to read this report with early adolescent boys and girls in mind, those remarkably alike and yet different, similar and yet unique, ordinary and yet extraordinary human beings who, as we did in the past, are going through this stage of life so critical to their future and to ours. We cannot afford to let them grow up forgotten.

Edward J. Meade, Jr.
The Ford Foundation
June 1986

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The preparation of *Improving Middle-Grade Schools: A Framework for Action* could not have been accomplished but for the important contributions of interest, time, and energy by many people.

Special thanks are due to the principals and staffs of the 11 schools whose improvement efforts are documented in this monograph. They provided invaluable information, thoughts, and ideas that laid the groundwork for the case studies and for the conclusions that can be drawn from them. Ultimately, it is hoped that their experiences will benefit others who seek to improve the status of young adolescents and their schools.

Don Davies and Ross Zerchykov of the Institute for Responsive Education assisted us in recruiting schools to participate in piloting the *Middle Grades Assessment Program* (MGAP) and in documenting its effectiveness as a school improvement process. Lending to this project their keen understanding of schools and educational change, Davies and Zerchykov were instrumental in chronicling the schools' experiences with MGAP and in identifying significant themes and lessons in the case studies.

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Jeffrey Ackerman	Susan Kaeser
Patterson Brown	Margel Kaufman
Toni Fink	Lucille Olivas
Mary Jackson-Willis	Pat Verner

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To all these colleagues, I express my gratitude for their contributions to this manuscript and my abiding respect for their active dedication to young adolescents and their schools.

Gayle Dorman

Chapter 1

The Middle Grades Assessment Program (MGAP)—A Framework for Action

MGAP Works; Schools Change

The **Middle Grades Assessment Program** (MGAP) was developed to help middle-grade schools become effective in educating young adolescents. It was born of concern about this age group and of the renewed interest in educational change throughout America. MGAP uses the spark of educational reform to kindle change in junior high and middle schools.

The eleven MGAP pilot schools whose stories are reported in this monograph form a diverse group. Eight are inner-city urban schools, two are rural, and one is located in a small town. Enrollments range from 500 to 1,000 students. The racial composition varies from an approximate 50–50 split between white and minority students to 93 percent minority, with some schools including a substantial number of immigrants and children whose proficiency in English is limited. From 40 to 100 percent of students are eligible for free lunches. Seven of the schools are middle schools with a grades 6–8 configuration, three are grades 7–9 junior high schools, and one is a grades 6–12 school.

Perhaps the most important conclusion to be drawn from these schools' experiences is that, in the hands of a good administrator, MGAP can work as an instrument for school improvement regardless of school size, grade configuration, socioeconomic status, racial composition, and physical facilities. Any failings in the assessment process or implementation of MGAP were due entirely to factors unrelated to the demographic and socioeconomic profiles of the schools.

By the end of the second semester following their MGAP assessments, teachers and principals in many of the 11 pilot schools were seeing results from their efforts to improve student behavior, instill pride and a sense of responsibility in students, raise academic performance, or institute new staffing arrangements.

What Is MGAP?

A middle-grade school that is safe and orderly, academically strong, and responsive to the developmental needs of young adolescents will be an effective school. It is a tall order to fill. The **Middle Grades Assessment Program** (MGAP) was designed to put our knowledge of early adolescence and effective schools to work. Schools can use MGAP to pave the way for the introduction of the best research and practice into the daily life of American middle-grade schools.

1. Early Adolescence

Early adolescence is a time of rapid and profound change for young people, with physical changes underscoring all others. Often, young people are excited by their more adult-like appearance and a bit mystified by their budding sexuality. The age of the onset and culmination of puberty varies widely among individual young people and between sexes, creating a tremendous diversity in physical maturity within the age group (*Tanner 1985, 1978*). This diversity fuels young adolescents' already burning question, "Am I normal?" and foils adults' attempts to categorize or describe them according to chronological age.

Most young adolescents are beginning gradually to master, at highly individual rates, new cognitive processes. To their repertoire of concrete operations, many begin to add formal operations. With the advanced cognitive processes come new abilities to think abstractly, to form and understand concepts, to hypothesize, and to think about one's own thoughts as well as others. Often unacknowledged by curriculum developers and teachers, the emergence of formal operations is of special import to early adolescent education.

For most young adolescents, a new sense of self, triggered by physical and cognitive changes, ripples through their social and emotional well-being, spilling over into every aspect of their lives. At the heart of this socio-emotional change is the defining of self in relation to the larger world. During the intermediate years of school, children emerge from the world of here-and-now into a wider world of novel and panoramic possibilities. Their

sense of personal achievement, competence, and commitment deepens; their understanding of life and of their future begins to take on new breadth and depth. They seek a new definition of themselves in the context of a larger world, and they bring great energy to their search.

A growing influence in this new world is the peer group. It provides a testing ground for new identities, deeper friendships, and experimental behavior. Young adolescents' intense need for peer acceptance, which sometimes seems indiscriminate and obsessive, makes them especially vulnerable to both negative and positive peer influence. Frequently, parents and teachers are rightfully concerned about young people's choices of friends and about social pressures during this age period. These concerns should not be dismissed, but should be tempered by an appreciation for the power of **positive** peer pressure.

Contrary to popular myth, young adolescents do not reject out of hand their attachments to adults as they form deeper peer relationships. It is true that, as part of their quest for identity and independence, they begin to challenge the vestiges of authority that they passively accepted at a younger age. However, young adolescents continue to look to their parents for affection, identification, values, and help in resolving big problems (*Kandel and Lesser 1972*). As children progress from the fifth to the ninth grades, parental influence in areas such as school problems, drug and alcohol use, sexuality, personal feelings, and decisions about their futures declines with each succeeding year, as peer influence increases. However, for many young adolescents, parents' influence remains greater than peers' influence throughout these years (*Benson 1984*). Likewise, teachers and other adults are important as role models and sources of encouragement and support. Not yet ready for total independence, young adolescent students need adult-imposed structure in their lives, along with opportunities to make choices within reasonable boundaries.

Adults, including educators, are sometimes tempted to dismiss the quandary of early adolescence as an eddying pool that will lack direction, no matter what the adults attempt to do. For two reasons, schools can ill afford to succumb to the temptation of neglect. First, adolescents are making decisions that will affect the remainder of their lives. Some of these decisions, such as drug use, dangerous

risk taking, and sexual activity, can bear dramatically on their health and their futures. Many young people make educational decisions that steer them away from careers in mathematics and science or, indeed, away from school altogether. How the dilemmas of early adolescence are resolved has far-reaching implications, both for individual young people and for society as a whole, for we all pay the price for lost potential and broken lives. Young people need adults to hold possibilities for the future before them. Their rapid growth and openness to new experiences bring unprecedented opportunities for intervention to guide, correct, and deepen patterns of learning and development.

Secondly, we cannot expect young people to shed all their excitement and confusion about their growing bodies, changing relationships, and expanding worlds at the school door as they enter. As Lipsitz has stated, "The imperatives of early adolescent development are too compelling to be overlooked or denied" (*1984, 6*). To ignore or attempt to suppress developmental realities is futile and potentially damaging to this demanding, intense age group.

Young adolescents need schools where the central tasks of teaching and learning are accomplished with sensitivity to their unique developmental energies, needs, and concerns. Indeed, such attentiveness may be essential for success in middle-grade schools. To focus on the turmoil is to eclipse a vision of its outcome. Young people need adults to maintain the direction and momentum when they cannot. Above all, they need adults who care about them as they mature.

2. Effective Schools: Expanding the Definition

The seminal work in the current effective schools movement is usually attributed to Ronald Edmonds, who used the sole criterion of student performance on standardized tests to identify four elementary schools in which students mastered the basic skills regardless of their social and economic backgrounds. From his study emerged a set of characteristics common to all four schools, which he and others developed into guidelines for increasing student achievement in any school.

Edmonds's five attributes of effective schools are:

- a clear school mission;

- monitoring of student progress;
- high expectations for student achievement;
- a safe and orderly school climate; and
- a principal who is an instructional leader (*1979*).

The effective schools movement is undergirded by the belief (and by supporting evidence from schools studied by Edmonds) that children from poor families can master basic skills on a par with children from middle class families. The relationship between home background and achievement should diminish as the school becomes more effective. One of the strengths of the effective schools movement is that it ratifies the power of the school to make a difference in academic achievement for those children who are frequently earmarked for failure due to factors related to family background and socioeconomic status.

Edmonds's five attributes have become the basis for school improvement programs at the elementary, middle-grade, and high school levels, providing a starting point by selecting one desired school outcome – respectable student performance on tests of basic skills – and relating school characteristics to its attainment. However, two problems, one practical and one philosophical, emerge when Edmonds's research is taken as a prescription for school improvement.

First, while the five attributes of "effective" elementary schools hold a common-sense value for all schools, we must take great care in generalizing findings from the lower elementary grades to the middle-grade and high school levels. For instance, some conditions that lead to a safe and orderly climate in an elementary school may become counterproductive at the middle-grade level. Also, the principal's role as "instructional leader" will certainly be defined differently in an elementary school than it will be in a large departmentalized secondary school.

Secondly, a definition of school effectiveness that is based on the sole criterion of performance on standardized tests can lead to narrow and minimalistic goals for schools. Mastery of basic reading, writing, and arithmetic skills by poor children as well as children of the middle class is an essential and enormously challenging goal for schools; however, it is the **least** we should expect from schools.

Edmonds's concept of school effectiveness has been expanded by the work of Michael Rutter and his colleagues in a study of secondary schools in London. Their study had a wider scope, taking into account outcome measures related to socialization as well as academic achievement. Rutter postulated four positive outcomes of schooling: good behavior, success in public exams, high attendance, and low delinquency rates outside school. Thus, Rutter looked beyond academic achievement, considering student behavior an equally important outcome of the internal life of the school. In applying this more ambitious definition of effectiveness, Rutter identified several features that foster pupil success. These features are:

- high levels of reward and praise;
- pleasant and comfortable school conditions;
- ample opportunities for students to take responsibility and participate in school operations;
- an academic emphasis set by the staff;
- the use of positive, effective group management skills by classroom teachers;
- positive modeling by teachers (e.g., punctuality, respect for others, caring for property); and
- consensus about curricular expectations, school norms, and discipline (*1979*).

Rutter's study concludes that "to an appreciable extent, children's behavior and attitudes are shaped and influenced by their experiences at school and, in particular, by the qualities of the school as a social institution" (*1979, 179*). Thus, the study expands the definition of effective schools by pointing toward the importance of incorporating the social and developmental needs of students into a broader range of educational outcomes. This was precisely the concept pursued by Joan Lipsitz in her study of successful middle-grade schools.

In 1980, Lipsitz set out to find examples of effective middle-grade schools in the United States. In establishing a set of criteria for identifying these schools, she expanded the definition of school effectiveness to address the particular developmental needs of early adolescent students. Beginning with a set of non-negotiable outcomes drawn from literature on school climate and effective schools and

from public opinion polls, Lipsitz selected four schools for an in-depth study of successful middle-grade education. Her "threshold," or entry criteria were:

- scores on standardized achievement tests at, above, or approaching the district mean;
- low absentee rates among students and staff;
- little or no destructive graffiti;
- low suspension rates;
- parental satisfaction; and
- a reputation for excellence (*1984*).

Each of the schools in Lipsitz's study revealed itself as sensitive to the developmental needs of young adolescents as it pursued competence in learning. She reports that successful schools are permeated with joy, with a vitality and sense of satisfaction that create a pleasant, cheerful, yet serious school climate for both students and adults (*1984*). In fact, Lipsitz concludes, "The most striking feature of the four schools is their willingness and ability to adapt all school practices to the individual differences in intellectual, biological, and social maturation of their students" (*1984, 167*). The schools intentionally create positive environments for personal and social growth, "not only because such environments contribute to academic achievement, but because they are intrinsically valued. . . as a goal, not a process toward a goal" (*1984, 168*).

3. MGAP: from Research to a Framework for Action

The distinction of the **Middle Grades Assessment Program** is that its conceptual foundation focuses on the widely diverse academic and developmental needs of middle-grade students, thus embracing an expanded definition of school effectiveness. Through MGAP, middle-grade educators apply what is known about early adolescence and effective schools by assessing their schools on the following criteria:

- Is the school safe?
- Is the school academically effective?
- Is the school responsive to young adolescents' developmental needs for:

- diversity?
- competence and achievement?
- structure and clear limits?
- meaningful participation in their school and community?
- self-exploration and self-definition?
- positive social interaction with both peers and adults?
- physical activity?

MGAP is also distinctive in its realism about how change happens. MGAP does not try to impose an idealized model or set of standards upon the school, but rather inspires improvement from within. The assessment team is comprised of six to eighteen people drawn from the school community of teachers, parents, and administrators. Team members may volunteer or be selected by the principal. The Center for Early Adolescence provides assessment materials and as much technical assistance as is needed.

As orientation, team members are given background information on early adolescence and effective schools. These preliminary sessions serve two purposes. First, they open the team members' minds to the broad scope of the assessment, enlightening them about the nature of early adolescence and the qualities of successful middle-grade schools. Second, they ward off the tendency toward perfunctory identification of needs and pat solutions; team members operate from a basis of informed opinion. The introductory sessions also provide a familiarity with MGAP that enables team members to decide whether the program is an appropriate vehicle for conducting an assessment at their school.

Because MGAP relies heavily on perceptions of people in and around the school, team members need to become keen observers and good listeners. They receive training in conducting interviews and making observations, then apply these skills during the assessment. Interviews are usually held with the principal, teachers, support staff, students, and parents. The team also examines the school environment; members observe classroom instruction and evaluate the physical facilities. In the final stage of the assessment, the MGAP team members amass and interpret

their findings, reaching conclusions about their school's responsiveness to each of MGAP's nine criteria. They select critical needs as top priorities for action, and then devise a plan for school improvement. MGAP serves as a bridge builder, not a landlord, to change. The process of improvement rests squarely on the shoulders of the school itself.

Why MGAP Works

MGAP works because it is a participatory, building-based process that 1) presents an orientation to school effectiveness that makes sense to middle-grade educators; 2) establishes this orientation as a conceptual context for school improvement; 3) establishes an environment that supports innovation; and 4) quickly engages teachers in both planning and implementing specific school improvements.

1. MGAP's underlying premise – that schools for young adolescents can and should be both academically effective and developmentally responsive – is credible and readily understood by both educators and parents.

In addition to ringing true with teachers' and principals' best visions for their schools, this premise is supported by the work of Lipsitz (*1984*), Joyce (*1983*), Epstein (*1981*), and Rutter (*1983, 1979*), who connect the social and academic dimensions of schooling. Principals and teachers who have decided to use MGAP say that its information base makes sense to them because it confirms their daily experiences with early adolescent students. In the words of one principal, "It gave us some real information about our students that is on-target and gives teachers added insight into the age group." Teachers generally do not use research information because they perceive it to be too abstract and impractical (*Fullan 1981*). It is more important to them that information or innovations be relevant to their personal situation; that the information comes from an expert or from research is not as critical (*Sieber 1981*).

The lack of consensus and research on middle-level education, coupled with the fact that many middle-grade teachers are trained to teach either elementary or high

school students, creates an information vacuum in many middle-grade schools, despite the principals' and staffs' best efforts. Lasting school change is predicated to a large degree upon individual teachers and administrators strengthening their understanding of and ability to work with young adolescents and then altering some of their professional attitudes and practices. MGAP gives educators new information that clarifies their daily school experiences while expanding their understanding of their students and of effective school practices.

Likewise, MGAP's developmental framework relates to the school context what parents know about their children from experience and common sense. When school assessment focuses directly on topics such as school financing, curriculum, or administration, few parents feel capable – or are perceived by educators to be capable – of grappling with these "professional" issues. MGAP is usable by parents who serve as assessment team members because it looks at the school from a perspective they can understand; the assessment allows them to consider how the school is affecting their children, while also guiding them to examine concerns broader than their own child's experience in the school.

2. MGAP establishes a widely understood and accepted conceptual context for school improvement.

Because the philosophical underpinnings and the research base of MGAP make sense to middle-level educators, teachers and principals are willing to engage in the MGAP process of examining and redefining personal and collective goals, philosophical orientations, and educational practices. This participatory, structured process builds consensus within the school regarding school-wide goals and a direction for school improvement efforts. One principal succinctly stated why a widely understood and accepted context for change is essential. "The minds and hearts of the people who are going to do the work have to be turned in the right direction." Through MGAP, he and his staff "gained a perspective that is vital to the movement we have made." Likewise, another principal believes that steps she and her school's faculty have taken to improve students' academic achievement could not have been addressed before MGAP because the staff lacked consensus about the school's philosophy and goals.

In reviewing a set of articles by David Crandall and his associates which report on their study of school improvements, Parish and Aquila conclude, "The most important fit is the one between the world view of the new program and the world view of the teachers" (*1983, 36*). The MGAP schools that have benefited most from their assessment and improvement efforts are the ones where the existing world view of teachers was challenged and redefined. These schools, like so many other middle-grade schools, lacked clarity of mission and direction, seeing themselves as "transitional" or as watered-down versions of high schools. Because middle-grade schools and teachers frequently suffer from a lack of identity and are afflicted with a world view that is inappropriate for the students they serve, a critical component in the process of school improvement at this level is establishing an appropriate world view, or a conceptual context, for change. Once the context is established, schools can undertake a coherent process of improvement where teachers are both informed consumers of imported innovations and thoughtful creators of new programs and approaches.

3. MGAP establishes an environment that supports innovation by fulfilling four essential functions.

First, MGAP establishes a collegial process for building on strengths, improving weak areas, and making decisions. Because of the duality in the roles of teachers and principals and the isolation of teachers, Joyce concludes that "Any attempt to create a better environment for education will have to decrease isolation, increase cooperative planning, and sharply lengthen the amount of time spent in meetings" (*1983, 69*). Corroborating this idea, Corbett suggests that changes are more likely to be accepted and implemented "in schools where teachers have opportunities to discuss and exchange ideas . . ." (*1982, 34*). MGAP team meetings, faculty meetings, informal discussions, and structured interviews afford teachers opportunities to exchange ideas and contribute to decision making.

MGAP also fulfills the assessment and planning functions from which substantive school improvements flow. By coupling observation with extensive interviewing, the assessment yields a qualitative, comprehensive picture of a school's strengths and weaknesses. Frequently, this picture recasts teachers' and principals' ideas about the school

and about desired changes. From this body of information, and from the broader context provided by a defined philosophical and conceptual orientation, comes the substance of school improvement. Through collegial work, schools can target and plan solutions that at least begin to bridge the gap between current reality and an articulated vision for the school.

The purpose of assessment and goal-setting is to select well-informed and carefully crafted innovations that achieve specific goals. As Susan Loucks-Horsley and Leslie Hergert point out, the initial solution may not always be the ideal solution, but, "By trying out the agreed-upon solution early (that is, not waiting a year or two until you're 'sure', whatever that means), what is actually being done can come closer and closer to the ideal" (*1985, 15*). MGAP empowers schools to act on the premise that once an accurate profile of the school's strengths and weaknesses has been charted and a direction for change has been determined, the business of school improvement can begin, with adjustments to be made as the process continues.

Another way in which MGAP creates an environment that supports change is by establishing, at least on an ad hoc basis, a leadership team for school improvement. In the schools where MGAP has had greatest impact, the assessment team or its leaders assumed responsibility for assessing the school; for extending involvement, understanding, and support for change throughout the staff; and for making sure planned changes were implemented. In many schools, the establishment of a strong, broad-based leadership team constitutes a fundamental restructuring of roles, lines of communication, and decision-making procedures.

Lastly, MGAP helps effect planned innovations by fostering a sense of ownership for the overall vision and philosophy it helps define, for specific innovations, and for the change process itself. As assessment, planning, and implementation progress and individuals begin to see the fruits of their labor, team members adopt MGAP as their own. The team sessions build among teachers consensus about goals, a sense of efficacy and hopefulness, and a strong momentum for change. The axiom that participation and action foster ownership is affirmed in the MGAP schools.

4. MGAP quickly engages teachers in both planning and implementing concrete school improvements, thus building their commitment to and support for further change.

In all of the MGAP schools, the initiation of the assessment and planning process evoked varying degrees of skepticism among team members, who were predominantly teachers. One team even built "bail-out points" into its schedule of tasks. While teachers' cynicism about the worthiness of initiatives to improve their schools is disturbing, it should not be surprising. Mann estimates about a 20 percent success rate for specific innovations such as new teaching technologies and new curricula (*1978*). Projects and programs – some exemplary and some ill-conceived – come and go, and teachers resent "wasting" their time on disjointed, short-lived projects. Often, this resentment feeds a sense of helplessness and hopelessness that must be countered before a comprehensive school improvement effort can be established.

From the first team meeting, MGAP participants are actively involved in learning information that has direct application to their work with students, in defining school goals, and in determining the substance of the improvement process. More importantly, they quickly become active in implementing changes. In the 11 pilot schools, the assessment and initial planning typically required eight to twelve weeks, with practically every school moving to implement at least one action plan during the same semester in which they conducted their assessment. Some of these early actions, such as expanding reward systems to recognize academic, cultural and behavioral achievements or reorganizing the dismissal of school, were relatively easy solutions to important but not terribly complex problems identified through the assessment. Seeing both direct application of the MGAP concepts and procedures to their day-to-day work as well as results from efforts to resolve specific problems, teachers were willing to invest time and energy in planning longer-range solutions to more complex problems.

The **Middle Grades Assessment Program** is an effective instrument for change because it recognizes three prerequisite steps to implementing specific innovations in many middle-grade schools – providing staff with usable knowledge about the age group they serve, building con-

sensus about a philosophical and conceptual context for improvement, and establishing broad-based leadership for change. Once these prerequisites are met, schools can proceed to plan and implement innovations that are part of a coherent plan for school improvement and that enable schools to better serve young adolescents.

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Chapter 2

Case Studies

The preceding analysis of why MGAP works and the lessons about improving middle-grade schools that follow in Chapter 3 are drawn from the actual experiences of the 11 pilot schools. To varying degrees, eight of the schools were successful in their improvement efforts. Three schools exhibit evidence of short-term and long-term improvements attributable to MGAP. MGAP's conceptual framework – that schools can and should be both academically effective and developmentally responsive – now permeates the schools' philosophies and motivates their policies. The momentum for improvement is self-sustaining and broad-based. Although the principals continue to provide important leadership, continuance of the improvements does not rest on any single individual. MGAP no longer exists as a distinct project at these schools and may seldom be mentioned by name, but its framework for improvement in middle-grade schools continues to influence the daily life of the schools.

In five of the schools, MGAP made significant contributions to short-term improvements, but the prognosis for long-term improvement is uncertain. The MGAP framework is well-established among some staff members, but not throughout the school.

Two schools began MGAP with great energy and resolve, only to have their efforts thwarted in one case by a series of personnel problems that dissolved faculty cohesion; and in the other by poor management at critical points in the MGAP process that deflated enthusiasm and support for the team's findings and recommendations. These schools have benefited from short-term improvements through MGAP but show little likelihood of sustaining or extending these benefits because internal support for the school improvement plan has almost totally eroded.

In one case, a school began but did not complete MGAP. The project was sabotaged by a principal who ostensibly supported the project while undermining the effort at every turn. Unfortunately, the legacy of MGAP at this school is frustration and disappointment. Its story, however, yields lessons for other schools.

In the following case studies, the identities of the schools and key players are masked by pseudonyms. The descriptions of the schools, however, are true and accurately depict the multitude of complex and sometimes elusive factors that shape schools' efforts to improve themselves.

Case Study

Carlton Middle School: Building Support for a Vision

Background

Jane Merner came to Carlton Middle School as its principal in the fall of 1982 with 21 years experience as a teacher, staff development specialist, and elementary school principal. At Carlton, she found a student population unusually challenging even in a large inner-city area: 940 sixth through eighth graders who spoke 23 different languages. Seventy percent of the students were eligible for free lunches; 40 percent were from families that received Aid for Dependent Children (AFDC) funding. Eighty percent were foreign-born; for some, Carlton was their first formal schooling. Teacher morale was low; discipline was perceived to be a problem. Students did not know what was expected of them.

Assessment Goals

Merner had two goals: to strengthen the school academically and to make it a more enjoyable place for both students and staff. She was committed to creating a school that was safe, academically effective, and sensitive to the developmental needs of young adolescents. Merner saw MGAP as a tool to assess how well the school was doing its job and to help her get the staff working together to improve the school. Very early in Carlton's assessment process, a member of the assessment team wrote, "MGAP puts into proper perspective what is needed at Carlton. I am hopeful that action will take the place of rhetoric." This team member's wish has been fulfilled. Under Merner's leadership, the school staff has acted to implement major changes recommended by the assessment team.

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Assessment Process

Members of Carlton's assessment team either volunteered or were appointed by Merner. The team consisted of Merner, two team leaders (Norma Myrick, resource teacher; and Steve McFadden, social studies teacher, chairman of the faculty council, and union representative), two vice-principals, six other teachers, one counselor, one paraprofessional, and one parent. The team held its first meeting in March 1983 when Myrick, McFadden, and consultant Rose Gomez trained the team to use MGAP. In April, team members observed all 43 classrooms and interviewed 52 staff members, 39 randomly selected students, and 29 parents, translating questions into native languages when necessary. (Carlton continues to translate into native languages surveys and other materials distributed to parents, something not widely done before MGAP.)

By observing their peers in action, team members saw fellow teachers using successfull teaching techniques that they wanted to learn and exchange.

The assessment process had an immediate informal effect on the school. By observing their peers in action, team members saw fellow teachers using successful teaching techniques that they wanted to learn and exchange. Members of the faculty began to share information and develop a new regard for each other. In a broader context, participation in the assessment interviews increased positive interaction among staff members, students, and parents. Faculty members, some of whom initially had been anxious about the assessment, began to look forward to its findings.

Concluding that Carlton was addressing young adolescents' academic and developmental needs to varying degrees, the team prepared a thorough formal report when it reconvened in mid-May. The report identified a number of the school's strengths. For example, the team found that the school's teachers routinely used a variety of instructional materials, responding to the students' diverse needs and learning styles. In addition, interviews with students and teachers made it clear that Carlton was well on the road to creating a positive working and learning environ-

ment. Teachers said they had opportunities to do things at school that they really enjoyed, and 99 percent of the students interviewed said they had opportunities for success at school. The team also found room for improvement, targeting three MGAP criteria – clear limits and appropriate structure for students, meaningful participation by students in the life of the school, and academic effectiveness – as top priorities for change.

Correcting Student Behavior

To address concerns about structure, limits and student behavior, Merner, the guidance counselors, and several teachers developed a school-wide discipline policy that clearly stated expectations for student behavior and detailed a sequential process for teachers to follow in referring students to the principal's office. They worked hard to communicate first to teachers and then to students the new policy and the reasons for the rules. They also developed an in-school detention program, along with a simple after-school detention program for dealing with "wanderers," students who were chronically tardy or cutting class. By the spring of 1984 – one year from the time the assessment team first convened – the school was experiencing dramatic results. The number of "wanderers" was down more than 60 percent, from 66 per week at the beginning of the school year, to about 20 per week by the middle of the spring semester. The average number of students in detention was cut in half; referrals to the counseling office for disciplinary reasons were down 19 percent. In October 1983, the suspension rate was 16 percent lower than the previous year; it had fallen an additional 31 percent by October 1984.

At the beginning of the 1985–86 school year, Carlton's staff simplified the discipline policy. The new policy required that the student, his or her parent, the teacher, and a counselor meet to decide any disciplinary step beyond detention. Under the former policy, teachers were not involved in this process and often were unaware of what steps were taken after they referred students to the counseling office.

Also in the fall of 1985, Carlton began two programs aimed at helping the school's most disruptive students. Since most of these students are in special education classes, the school's five special education teachers sug-

gested that each of them be freed for a period of counseling time. Now, when a disruption occurs, a familiar teacher is available to work with the student. In addition, one of the resource teachers has established a class in which students act out situations that prompt them to misbehave and practice appropriate behaviors for those situations.

Summarizing the school's efforts to improve student behavior, Merner says, "We're looking at guidance and discipline in new ways and working on positive reinforcement. Kids don't feel the need to act out." The school has come so far, according to Merner, that if the assessment were done today, improving structure and limits would not be a major concern.

Promoting Student Pride

Addressing the criterion of meaningful participation, the assessment team formed a "Spirit Committee" in the fall of 1983 to promote pride in the school and student involvement in planning and carrying out school activities. A teacher who was also an MGAP team member led the committee, which included any staff members and students who wanted to join. After submitting a successful proposal to the city's Education Fund, the group received $1,000 to support activities such as field days, a film series, and an awards program for students who contribute positively to the life of the school. Merner attributes the immediate reduction of incidents of vandalism and graffiti to a raised level of student pride and participation in school activities. During the 1984–85 school year, the Spirit Committee also applied for and received a $1,000 dissemination grant to produce a booklet that would help other schools establish their own spirit committees. Carlton's Spirit Committee, now on firm footing, has been able to continue its activities without special funding. The committee's success also led to positive publicity for the school when it was featured in one of the Education Fund's publications.

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Another Spirit Committee goal was to bring together the two cultures – black and Asian – that represent the majority of Carlton's students. Students have organized several assemblies and produced a multi-cultural slide show aimed at increasing cross-cultural understanding. At the school's new bi-weekly "Club Day," teachers sponsor high-interest activities, ranging from jewelry making to learning leadership skills, with students choosing the one in which they want to participate. Ethnic and racial understanding has been enhanced as students have interacted with each other in enjoyable activities of their own choice. Merner observes, "Although students still tend to prefer friends of their own ethnicity, they are more actively involved in multi-ethnic groups during school activities."

Improving Academic Effectiveness

Academic effectiveness – the assessment team's third priority – is Carlton's current school improvement thrust. According to Merner, the staff recognized that sixth grade students who were achieving below grade level when coming to Carlton would inevitably fall farther behind unless they were identified early and helped. Since reading ability is a key to academic success, the staff decided that each sixth grade teacher would become a reading teacher every day during the first period. Sixth grade students were grouped for the reading classes by ability, based on a diagnostic test given at the beginning of the school year. The program will be expanded to the seventh grade next year and to the eighth grade the following year. Carlton also has begun a before-school tutorial program staffed by paid parents for any student desiring additional help. According to Merner, the program has had good attendance since its beginning in the spring of 1985.

Standardized test scores indicate that Carlton is making progress toward its goal of improving academic effectiveness. For example, sixth graders' average raw score on reading in 1983–84 was 184; the following year it was up to 202. Eighth graders' reading scores averaged 173 in 1983–84 and 182 in 1984–85. Merner notes that Carlton's scores compare favorably with those of other schools with similar populations. "With our student body, we should be at the bottom [in test-score rankings] in the district, but we're ninth out of 16 middle schools in eighth grade math and second in history," she said.

Creative Programming

Some of the innovations at Carlton combine academic improvement with other goals from the assessment. For example, after-school courses such as "Music around the World" and "Literature through Different Cultures," serve a double purpose in providing both academic enrichment and cultural awareness. Similarly, drama productions and other participatory activities encourage harmony within a diverse student population. The optional after-school enrichment program began in November 1985; by January, 250 students were participating. The program, which Merner expects will lead to improvements in academic achievement, focuses on reading, math, and oral and written language through student-to-student tutoring and high-interest topics such as art, music, computers, and photography.

To respond to the assessment team's conclusion that students needed more positive reinforcement, Carlton began rewarding academic achievement and desirable behavior through an "outstanding student lottery." Taking advantage of the excitement over the state's new lottery, Carlton has initiated its own school lottery. Students earn tickets for good work, contributions to school life, or kindness to others. Each day in every class teachers distribute tickets to three deserving students. These students become eligible for a regularly held school-wide drawing for prizes that range from Carlton pencils to Thanksgiving turkeys.

Additionally, in accordance with the team's recommendations that Carlton increase its emphasis on career education, modern technology, and outreach to the community, the school has begun to form partnerships with businesses to help students learn about career choices. Financed by the businesses involved, this new program will sponsor field trips for students and teachers, providing pre-vocational exploration as well as an opportunity for businesses to learn about their community's middle school.

Continuing Effect of MGAP

MGAP was a major force in creating a more productive and positive environment for both students and teachers at Carlton. Merner says that MGAP gave the team members an effective way to work together. MGAP gave them a structured process for visiting each other's classrooms, talking about problems, making plans, and evaluating

programs. Merner admits she had had a "jaded" opinion of group processes. As a former staff development specialist, she had participated in too many group experiences in which little substance remained after the group's initial elation subsided. However, although Carlton's honeymoon period with MGAP has ended, Merner sees substantial long-term effects. She calls the 1984–85 school year Carlton's "reflective period," in which the staff members considered what they had learned from MGAP. In the 1985–86 school year, they instituted many new programs based on the results of the assessment.

Interestingly, all of the teachers who were generally acknowledged by the staff and Merner to be ineffective and unwilling to change have left Carlton voluntarily.

Interestingly, all of the teachers who were generally acknowledged by the staff and Merner to be ineffective and unwilling to change have left Carlton voluntarily. They felt uncomfortable, Merner says, because they were not delivering what she and their peers expected after they completed the school assessment. Those teachers who remain are working collegially toward the goals that they framed during the assessment process. Merner sees the continued influence of MGAP in the teachers' commitments to maintain and improve programs they have begun in response to the assessment team's concerns about student discipline, student participation, and achievement.

Empowered to make their school a better place, staff members selected academic effectiveness as a common goal. Merner is confident that the school will continue to move forward academically. She believes that academic effectiveness could not have been addressed before MGAP because the staff lacked consensus about the school's philosophy and goals. The MGAP process gave Carlton's teachers a way to set priorities for their school with the principal's support.

Carlton Middle School's assessment experience is an example of how a dynamic, talented principal in her first year at a school can use MGAP as a tool to get to know her students, staff, and parents quickly, communicate her philosophy and expectations to staff and students, build support for her vision of the school, and implement improvements consistent with her vision.

Case Study

Patrick Henry Junior High School: Creating a Blueprint for Change

Background and Goals

Faced with the impending transition from a grades 7–9 junior high school to a grades 6–8 middle school, Principal Elaine Jespers saw a critical need for thoughtful assessment and planning at Patrick Henry Junior High. As co-chairperson of her district's middle-school transition committee, she had a special appreciation for both the complexity and the promise of the changes that lay before Henry and the district's other junior high schools. She believed MGAP would show her what Henry needed to do to become a successful middle school. It would also help her examine what the school had accomplished in a specially-funded program focusing on reading skills. "MGAP is an excellent tool for getting information about what is **really** going on in a school and for planning based on that information," says Jespers. She had had high hopes for what her school could do with the assessment, and two-and-a-half years after the assessment process began, she is not disappointed.

"MGAP is an excellent tool for getting information about what is really going on in a school and for planning based on that information."

In the spring of 1983, Henry had 580 students. Located in the inner-city of a large metropolitan area, Henry had a student population that was about two-thirds black; most of the other students were white. Seventy-one percent came from families that received some kind of public assistance. Reading test scores had risen dramatically, perhaps as a result of the special reading program, but a significant number of students still scored below the national average on standardized tests.

Assessment Process

Although Jespers was convinced that MGAP would be beneficial, she did not want to undertake the assessment unless the school's staff concurred. In May 1983 she pre-

sented MGAP to Henry's Staff Leadership Team, a group of teachers who helped plan the school's programs. Skeptical, the Staff Leadership Team asked questions about the amount of time MGAP would require, class coverage for team members, and union issues related to performance evaluation and time spent outside the classroom. Despite their apprehension, they decided to try MGAP. Mary Glenn, who initially was one of the most dubious members of the group, changed her mind about doing the assessment because the MGAP materials so realistically described the children she was teaching. Ultimately, Glenn became the assessment team liaison to the principal and one of MGAP's staunchest supporters.

The Staff Leadership Team decided not to become the assessment team. Instead, Jespers introduced MGAP to the entire faculty and asked for volunteers. From the volunteers, she and the Staff Leadership Team selected a cross-section of the faculty – seven teachers – to serve on the assessment team. A parent and a neighborhood resident also were appointed to the team.

Although only seven teachers were on the assessment team, MGAP at Henry was a project of the entire faculty. Besides being interviewed, teachers not on the assessment team used their free periods to cover the classes of colleagues involved in interviews and observations. Faculty members were kept up-to-date on the progress of the assessment through memos, conversation in the lounge, and notes on teachers' bulletin boards. Jespers was not a part of the team, but by handling necessary administrative matters and more importantly, by encouraging people to share their concerns with the assurance that they would be considered and addressed, she effectively communicated by word and deed that the assessment was to be taken seriously.

Glenn reported that the assessment process (which involved observing classrooms and interviewing about ha[illegible] of the school's teachers as well as parents, students, and support staff members) produced some immediate results. As teachers learned about the needs of young adolescents, they began to incorporate ways of meeting these needs into their teaching. For instance, MGAP alerted Glenn, an English teacher, to young adolescents' need for self-definition and self-exploration, so she began to assign daily journal

writing that would help her students explore their own experiences and feelings. The assessment also helped the team members build the professional relationships necessary for the team teaching that was to come when the school became a middle school. In addition, the student interviews helped to clear up some misconceptions. For example, Glenn had thought the school had a strong student council but found that students dismissed the council as irrelevant and ineffective. The MGAP interview questions uncovered the truth about how students perceived the school.

The MGAP interview questions uncovered the truth about how students perceived the school.

Priorities for School Improvement

The team chose three priorities for school improvement: clarifying structure and limits for students, increasing student, parent, and staff participation in the school, and fostering positive social interaction among students and between staff and students. The team then drew up an impressive "effective school plan" that became the school's map for improvement. Jespers called the plan her "instructions" for making Henry a middle school. "They [central office administrators] tell me to make this a middle school, but they don't say how," she said. "This tells me what I am going to do – and the teachers have a sense of ownership about it."

Jespers had not anticipated that shortly after she received the plan in the fall of 1983, the school board and central office administrators would tell her not to make Henry a middle school – yet. After several alterations, the timetable for the district-wide transition to middle schools was postponed until fall 1986. Although Henry's assessment team members originally envisioned the MGAP plan as part of the transition to a middle school, they decided not to postpone MGAP implementation.

Henry began its MGAP improvement efforts by addressing students' need for clear structure and limits. A committee of teachers, students, and parents was formed to establish a discipline program that would begin with the 1984–85 school year. The committee set expectations

for behavior, then devised specific rules and responsibilities related to the expectations. Jespers describes the program as a contract between students and staff: "You show us you are responsible, and we will give you special events, such as field trips and skating parties." To honor students for improvement in citizenship and academics in each grading period, every teacher recommends two students for most-improved awards. The winners are honored with a special event, such as a pizza party, and their names and photos are posted on a hallway bulletin board. Jespers noted that some of the winners have never received awards before; in fact, two or three students with histories of chronic behavior problems have won the citizenship award. According to Jespers, student behavior throughout the school is much improved as a result of these dual efforts to define and enforce limits and to reward positive behavior.

One of the most important outcomes of MGAP at Henry was that it increased the staff's awareness that middle-grade students are much more like elementary school students than the secondary-oriented faculty had realized. The assessment led to a much more humanitarian approach to schooling at Henry and inspired greater sensitivity to the needs of young adolescents. For example, when teachers realized that their students needed rewards and recognition, they built rewards into the structure and limits plan and established the "most-improved" awards. In addition, teachers now display student work in all areas of the school. "We were surprised at how much junior high kids relate to that," Jespers said. "We sometimes forget that they still are young enough to want such rewards and recognition." Students have responded by trying to do better quality work so they will be proud of what is posted.

The assessment led to a much more humanitarian approach to schooling at Henry and inspired greater sensitivity to the needs of young adolescents.

Standardized test scores have steadily improved at Henry since 1983. More than 86 percent of the students scored above average on standardized tests in 1985, a two percent increase over the previous year. In addition, scores show that more students are moving into the above-average range and are maintaining their performance levels.

Block Scheduling and Team Leadership

Recognizing that many young adolescents have difficulty adjusting to the move from elementary school to a larger, more impersonal, and departmentalized junior high school, Henry's assessment team recommended a major change in school organization: the introduction of block scheduling to allow interdisciplinary team teaching. At the beginning of the 1984–85 school year, four seventh grade teachers – one each in language arts, social studies, science, and math – volunteered to work together with a common group of students for four periods a day and to share a common planning period. Because of the success of this pilot effort and the MGAP team's support for team teaching, block scheduling and team teaching were extended to all three grades in 1985. The approach has produced several benefits. First, within the blocks, teachers have begun using a variety of creative teaching activities. For instance, language arts and social studies teachers worked together for the first time on units related to Black History Month. Students learned about black history, then used their knowledge to write essays and poems, some of which won city-wide awards. The block scheduling also has given Henry's teachers the flexibility of using one, two, three, or even all four periods for special activities or field trips.

Block scheduling has had a positive effect on student behavior, as evidenced by decreases in the number of suspensions, in-class behavior problems, and students referred to the principal's office for disciplinary reasons. Jespers attributes this improvement to the consistency in teachers' expectations and to students' strengthened relationships with adults since the advent of block scheduling and team teaching. When there is a problem with a student, his or her teachers use their common planning period to discuss how to solve it. When parents come to conferences, they meet with all four of their child's core subject teachers at once, thus gaining a much clearer picture of their child's behavior and progress. Team teaching has brought teachers, students, and parents together and given them the time and opportunity to focus their attention on the needs of individual children.

Long before the assessment, Henry's staff had discussed block scheduling, team teaching, and other middle school practices. The shift to these practices, however, had never

been attempted. Most of the teachers were trained in secondary teaching, and all of them were accustomed to the departmentalized junior high school. "MGAP gave teachers the courage and supporting data to say, 'Let's try it,'" says Jespers.

To make the school more responsive to young adolescents' need for positive relationships with adults and peers, Henry opened the 1985–86 year with a new adviser-advisee program. A maximum of 16 students are randomly assigned to each faculty adviser across grade levels and programs. The groups meet bi-weekly for 40-minute periods during which they work on activities and projects designed to improve individual students' self-esteem and human relations throughout the school. Advisee groups also compete for prizes in school competitions, such as attendance contests and intramurals. Teachers' experiences with and attitudes toward the program have varied from enthusiastic success to uneasiness with their roles as advisers, according to Jespers. To help those who are struggling, Jespers has arranged in-service programs featuring the most effective teacher-advisers who share their activities and techniques.

Another team objective was to develop a definition of parent involvement that was appropriate for the school and then to reach out to parents and the community as a whole. The vast majority of the students' parents work full-time, so they cannot come to the school during the day. Jespers defined "involved parents" as those who are knowledgeable about the school's goals and objectives, supportive of the school, and willing to help their children learn. A key to involving parents, according to Jespers, was getting them to see the school as part of the community. The students' involvement in worthwhile community projects, such as the adoption of a senior citizens' home, was a step in that direction. The school also entered into the solution of community problems. In one instance, a gang of older youths was disturbing the community, and harrassing Henry students in particular. Jespers and some of her staff met with community leaders and parents and developed a successful action plan for dealing with the gang. Now that

A key to involving parents. . .was getting them to see the school as part of the community.

it holds community meetings on a regular basis, the school is regarded as part of the community and its staff is seen as people who care about the community. "Some parents are not comfortable on our turf, so we reach out to meet them in the community," Jespers says.

Transition to a Middle School

Henry has accomplished virtually everything recommended by the assessment team in its plan. Continued implementation and fine-tuning of the MGAP recommendations are in the hands of a management team composed of Jespers and respresentatives from the school's teaching, guidance, secretarial, custodial, and security staffs. Jespers says the biggest obstacle to total implementation of the MGAP plan has been high staff turnover. Fourteen of Henry's 38 teachers were new at the beginning of the 1984–85 school year. Fortunately, the next year saw a much lower turnover, primarily among teachers of elective courses. All teachers have copies of the plan, which is still referred to as the "middle grades plan," and are involved in its implementation. However, new teachers have received no training to introduce them to the concepts behind MGAP. Jespers acknowledges that it would be beneficial for the Staff Leadership Team or assessment team to hold an MGAP orientation session for the new teachers.

"[MGAP] gave us real information about early adolescent students in general and about our school's students in particular. Before it was hit or miss."

Jespers is very pleased with what Henry has done with MGAP. "It gave us direction and support," she says. "It gave us real information about early adolescent students in general and about our school's students in particular. Before it was hit or miss." She noted that, prior to MGAP, the school had resources from the special reading project but was not sure what to do with them. The MGAP plan became the basis of the school's successful applications for continued funding of the reading project in the 1984–85 and 1985–86 school years, and the staff has now linked together MGAP and the reading program. For example, reading program funds finance a quarterly newsletter to parents that keeps parents informed about events at the school.

It is significant that Henry's staff, led by Jespers, felt confident and empowered to move ahead and implement middle school practices recommended by the assessment team despite the district's postponement of the official transition to middle schools. The school staff felt that MGAP gave them adequate data and a thoughtfully prepared action plan to support and guide their efforts. According to Jespers, teachers and parents took ownership of MGAP because they were represented on the team and involved in developing the plan. "You can't push things on people," she said.

As a result, Jespers believes that the official transition will not bring great changes to Henry. The school will be better able to integrate fifth and sixth graders into the school because it has had a head start on implementing practices designed to ease the younger students' transition from elementary school. Since they moved into middle school practices gradually and voluntarily, Henry's teachers felt more willing and confident than they otherwise might have, had they made district-mandated changes all at once. MGAP enabled them to "iron out wrinkles" in new programs by gradually phasing in additional activities and responsibilities. Jespers noted that other schools in the district will "start at zero." Henry's teachers are ready for the transition. Furthermore, because the school already has implemented many middle school practices, the teachers have a sound basis for deciding whether to stay at the intermediate level or to move to the high school when the transition does occur. Most of the staff plans to stay, and some attribute their decisions largely to MGAP. For example, Glenn had taught only ninth graders before the assessment, but she plans to stay at Henry because "now my greatest interest is in teaching young adolescents."

Principals from other schools already are visiting Henry to see how middle school practices work. Jespers says she would not be surprised if the district's other intermediate schools emulate some of the changes made at Henry. As co-chairperson of the transition committee, she would like to see other junior high schools in the city use MGAP to prepare blueprints for making themselves into middle schools.

Case Study

William McKinley Middle School: Turning People's Minds and Hearts

Background

William McKinley Middle School serves 900 low-income, predominantly black, highly transient students in a large southern city with an economy based on industrial complexes and a naval shipyard. In fact, the fuel depot for the naval shipyard is buried in the seemingly empty lot adjacent to the school. Before 1979, McKinley had been a high school with a notoriously poor reputation. In that year, it was converted to a grades 6–8 middle school. When MGAP began in the spring of 1983, McKinley was still struggling with its new middle school identity. Although most students' test scores were below grade level, the schools' scores had risen six to eight percentage points over those of the preceding year. Most of McKinley's teachers, transferees from elementary or secondary schools, had come to the newly reorganized middle school unfamiliar with the early adolescent age group and effective middle school practices. Similarly, the community had little knowledge about the philosophy behind the reorganization. In addition, McKinley High School's poor reputation carried over to the totally new middle school.

David Doherty, who came to McKinley as principal in 1981, had one goal for the school: to make it the most effective middle school in the county. Jim Tompkins, the school's guidance counselor and MGAP team leader concurred, "Our children deserve the best education they can possibly get, because they have so many strikes against them already." In order to accomplish his goal for the school, Doherty felt he needed more parent, student, and teacher involvement in the school and more positive, productive student-teacher interaction. In order to realize his vision, he used MGAP to build support among both the staff and the community.

Doherty and Tompkins chose four community representatives and 12 faculty members representing the various disciplines and grade levels for the MGAP assessment team. The community representatives were the head of the local NAACP, the director of a public service corporation,

a representative of a railway company, and a member of the district school board. Although their schedules did not allow them to participate fully in the data gathering, Doherty kept the community team members well informed so they felt involved throughout the assessment.

MGAP's Effect on Teachers

Doherty considered the assessment to be an in-service program that would help the school's entire staff learn about middle school students. The team's training session was held away from school at a local hotel, which helped to show that the assessment was a special and important undertaking for the school. Following the team's training, Doherty and Tompkins conducted an abbreviated MGAP training session for the entire faculty in order to bring everyone into the assessment process. McKinley's staff thereby gained insight into early adolescence before data gathering even began.

Long before any formal improvement efforts began, Doherty noted, "It remains to be seen what all the outcomes will be, but the (MGAP) training process has transformed some people and some practices at this school." Before MGAP began, according to Doherty, a number of McKinley's teachers truly did not understand that middle school youth are different from high school students. Almost immediately following the faculty sessions on needs and characteristics of young adolescents, teachers referred fewer students to the office because of behavior problems. Doherty attributed the drop to teachers' better understanding of young adolescents. Now they could deal with problems themselves; also, they decided that some student demeanor they had perceived as troublesome was normal early adolescent behavior.

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After the assessment, the team ranked meaningful participation, competence and achievement, and academic effectiveness as its top priorities for school improvement. Tompkins was surprised that the teacher interviews yielded

few "pie in the sky" requests for projects that would require large amounts of additional funding. Instead, the teachers were most interested in improving staff cohesion, creating interdisciplinary planning time, strengthening administrative leadership, and improving communication among staff, students, and parents. Teachers emphasized the need for more positive recognition for staff and students and the need for clear structure and limits in the school. They also wanted more parent participation and greater curricular and instructional diversity.

In the summer of 1983, Doherty held staff meetings to plan for implementation of the team's recommendations. By the time school opened, McKinley had already begun to implement some of those recommendations.

Academic Improvement

The MGAP recommendations brought clarity and direction to Doherty's vision. The MGAP team initially focused on increasing positive, productive student-teacher interaction, a critical element in McKinley's becoming "the best middle school in the county." Following through on recommendations from the MGAP assessment team, the school strengthened its efforts to improve academic and social interactions between students and staff. Beginning in the fall semester, teachers periodically diagnosed each student's progress on the district's basic skills. At the end of every six-week period, the student and his or her teacher evaluated exactly where the student stood in mastering specific skills. The result, according to Doherty, has been more individualized instruction and teachers' greater willingness to work with individual students before and after school. In this case, the district set the basic skills objectives but the school administration set the expectation that the objectives would be taken seriously, and that individual instruction based on diagnostic tests would be accepted practice in the school. Expanding this focus on individualized, intensive help for students, in January 1985 the school initiated after-school tutoring by teacher aides, a service that continues to be used by many students.

This intensive and targeted attention to academic performance has paid off. Whereas 34 percent of the school's seventh graders scored under the 35th percentile in reading and language arts in 1982, only 14.3 percent scored in that

range in 1984–85. As an award for improving student achievement in reading and mathematics, McKinley received a $20,300 incentive grant from the State Department of Education for the 1985–86 school year. McKinley's students and teachers decided to spend the incentive grant to purchase computer software, books for recreational reading, a television for each classroom, and a machine that can be programmed to call the parents of students who are absent from school. Doherty gives credit for academic improvement to the incentives provided by the state grant and to teachers' new understanding of the academic and developmental needs of young adolescent students, which they gained through MGAP.

Promoting Pride and Responsibility

Using the assessment team's findings and recommendations as a guide, McKinley's staff also improved student behavior and increased positive student involvement in the school. The beginning of the 1984–85 school year brought a concerted effort to enforce the school's rules more consistently. Students received an attractive folder with the rules printed on the inside, then discussed these expectations for behavior in homerooms. In addition, Doherty and Tompkins met with the staff to focus on the need for uniform enforcement of the rules. When teachers seemed to become lax or inconsistent about enforcing the rules, additional meetings were scheduled.

McKinley also established two new programs for dealing with students who break the rules: Saturday school workdays and an in-school suspension program. In spring 1985, McKinley held a series of Saturday workdays as an alternative to suspension for students who had misbehaved. The school required students to come to the school at 8 a.m. on Saturday and work outside on grounds maintenance until 12:30 p.m. Through the in-school suspension program, begun in fall 1985, students remain in school, totally separated from the rest of the student body, and keep up with their studies through tutoring and completing assignments while suspended from their regular classes. The program is working, according to Tompkins, because students feel that "it is embarrassing, like standing in the corner." Mid-way through the 1985–86 school year, Doherty reported that school discipline has been so much better that no Saturday work day has been necessary.

Just as importantly, for the first time McKinley has begun giving special awards for good behavior, such as ice cream and a special sign for the class that is most well-behaved in the cafeteria. Tompkins admitted in the spring of 1985 that "some of the things we are doing are 'hokey,' but they mean a lot to the students. The class that won the cafeteria award one month plastered their room with signs saying 'We're Number One'." "Hokey" or not, the awards recognize good behavior and are a source of student pride in themselves and in their school. By December 1985, Doherty reported that McKinley's students had evolved from being "teacher directed" to being "student assertive" in accepting responsiblity. For example, although the school has switched from all-day custodians to an evening cleaning service, the building is cleaner than ever before because students sweep and pick up trash during the day. The clean-up effort was initiated by the seventh graders, and the administrators, teachers, and seventh graders challenged the other students to join in the work. An ethos of pride and personal responsiblity has grown out of the staff's concerted effort to reward positive behavior.

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Student Participation and Parent Involvement

The assessment team was also concerned that students have a more meaningful voice in the operation of the school. This heightened concern brought forth two volunteers to sponsor the student council, which had been defunct for two years for lack of a faculty sponsor. In addition to initiating a successful peer counseling program, the student council also offers an avenue for students to make suggestions and air concerns. Alternatively, any group of students may approach Tompkins, the guidance counselor, with requests and suggestions for change. He helps them put their proposal in writing, and then the students ask for an appointment with the principal to present their idea. For example, one group of students wanted to be allowed to go outside and use the front lawn during lunch. They wrote a proposal, presented a good argument, agreed to Doherty's guidelines, and got what

they wanted. As the student council has grown stronger, more proposals are written by the council than by individual students. Regardless of who develops the proposals, Tompkins and Doherty agree that the process is more important than the specific changes, because it teaches students to develop their ideas fully and persuasively and to follow an accepted method for instigating change.

MGAP prompted the entire McKinley staff to think about new ways to promote positive social interaction between students and staff, both as a goal in itself and as a support for the school's academic program. The results are more informal, relaxed relationships between teachers and students and increased student motivation to behave and perform well. Tompkins points out that it is hard to say what has been caused by MGAP and what would have happened without MGAP, but he notes that teachers were "amazed that so much has happened in two years."

Because the community has noticed the improvements at McKinley, the school has begun to shed the former high school's poor reputation. The school's business sponsor, a local radio station, is helping shape a new identity for the school by providing a great deal of on-air publicity for the school.

Doherty thinks MGAP "cemented parent-teacher cooperation" by giving parents a unique opportunity, through the interviews conducted by the assessment team, to state their opinions to the administration and to the faculty. McKinley's PTA was not functioning when the assessment was conducted. In the spring of 1984, Doherty reorganized the PTA, which began to sponsor a variety of activities to raise money and to give the school's students, faculty, and parents opportunities to interact. Other PTA programs have dealt with more substantive issues. For example, the group sponsored a session in which counselors from the high school answered questions from parents of graduating students. The average turnout for regular PTA meetings, which was 30–50 in 1984–85, doubled in the next 6 months. Tompkins attributes the better attendance to the school's efforts to include crowd-drawing activities on the

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PTA program, such as performances by the school chorus. Already the PTA has spawned increased involvement by parents in other aspects of the school. For example, about a half dozen parents now regularly volunteer for classroom or office work.

MGAP As a Catalyst for Change

MGAP did not point Doherty and his school in an entirely new direction, but Doherty says that through MGAP he and other staff members "gained a perspective that is vital to the movement we have made." MGAP helped the faculty see that middle school students are different from elementary and high school students. It demonstrated some alternatives for doing things differently and "what kinds of practices make for good middle school teaching," according to Doherty. MGAP also has stimulated discussion about teaching styles and methods, making teachers more aware of the importance of employing a variety of instructional methods and materials with early adolescent students.

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Would the academic and climate improvements have come about just as easily without MGAP? "No way," says Doherty. "The minds and hearts of the people who are going to do the work have to be turned in the right direction." Moreover, the school's experience with MGAP has prepared it to respond to other school improvement mandates, such as the state-wide Education Improvement Act. The Act will channel new funds into schools for five years, but also stipulates higher academic requirements. Since the Act does not stipulate how schools are to help students meet the higher requirements, Doherty observes that many school staffs are baffled about what to do. At McKinley, staff members already have a vision for their school and know how to work toward improvement: they have the experience of planning and implementing improvements through MGAP. They also understand the unique developmental and academic needs of the young adolescents they teach. Thus, they are already headed in a clear direction.

Case Study

Ellis Bay Middle School: Focusing Attention on Improving Teaching and Learning

Background

Ellis Bay, previously an all-black high school serving a southern rural area, converted to a grades 6–8 middle school in 1970. When MGAP began in the spring semester of 1983, the school had 445 students; 73 percent were black, and a small percentage were migrant Mexican-American children. Because the area had been relatively isolated for many years, most of the students were related by blood or marriage. Ninety percent of the faculty had been at Ellis Bay eight or more years. Scores on standardized achievement tests had been rising, with two-thirds of the student body scoring at or above the national average. Three-quarters of the students were eligible for free lunches. Ironically, although the school served a predominantly very low-income population, a nearby resort with many wealthy absentee owners and investors had raised the tax base in the area, causing the school to lose its Chapter 1 income-based funding for the 1983–84 school year. However, after representatives of the school pleaded their case to the county school board, many of the programs formerly financed under Chapter 1 were restored with local funding.

Assessment Process

In MGAP, Principal Charles Rawlings saw a tool for imparting information about the early adolescent learner and inspiring more effective leadership and classroom teaching. From the school's faculty, parents, and community he selected the assistant principal, the guidance counselor, two teachers, three parents (including the Parent Teacher Organization president and representatives of school volunteers and Chapter 1 parents), and Edna Dwyer, a curriculum specialist with the school's federally funded program for improving academic performance and social adjustment. Team members chose Dwyer as team leader because of her ability to keep the team on task and her experience with other assessments. Teachers Charlaine Whitfield and Barbara Godfrey served as assistant team leaders. The team members shared Rawlings's goals of strengthening the school's leadership and teaching and also

aimed for a healthier social and emotional environment for students.

After interviewing the school's advisory council, the Parent Teacher Organization officers, 24 students, and 24 parents, and observing all of the school's classrooms, the team concluded that increasing academic effectiveness should be the school's top priority. This conclusion was consistent with earlier assessments at Ellis Bay. However, Dwyer noted that only MGAP helped the faculty draw conceptual and practical connections between the realities of early adolescent development and student learning. The school proceeded to implement several changes recommended by the team.

Classroom Interruptions

The observations had identified problems with two kinds of classroom interruptions: school intercom announcements and administrative visits during class time. Before MGAP, Dwyer said, no one had considered the repercussions of making announcements over the school intercom during class time. After MGAP, the principal started making most announcements at one expected time when he would least interfere with instruction. The second problem team members observed was that the school's assistant principals and counselors often came into the classroom to ask a teacher a question, deliver something, or pick up papers. Although that problem has not been totally alleviated, MGAP has made everyone aware of the time lost to teaching when these interruptions occur.

Increased Opportunities for Students

The school has also acted on the team's recommendation to provide more opportunities for greater numbers of students to exhibit competence and to be recognized for their academic and artistic achievements. The team noted that competition at the school was exclusively athletic. To recognize academic achievement, the school began a Junior Beta Club and improved its program for gifted and talented students. But the team was also concerned that the "average" students be given avenues for recognition. There has been a school-wide effort to praise student progress, display work, encourage high performance, and teach test-taking skills. Awards assemblies have recognized students who show competence in music, essay writing, and art.

Parents interviewed by the assessment team identified the inaccessibility of the library as an impediment to students' independent learning. Students could not go into the library alone at any time; they were unaware that the library was open to them 30 minutes before school. A committee of parents and teachers studied the problem and organized several in-school workshops to discuss library functions. Students are now using the library before school opens, at lunch time, and for 30 minutes after school. They may also use the library independently during the school day with permission from a teacher. Library use has increased greatly, to the pleasure of parents, students, and teachers.

Improving Instruction

Ellis Bay's teachers also began a concerted effort to diversify their teaching techniques by using class discussion, small groups, and varied activities in the classroom. For example, a language arts teacher assigned students to produce a newspaper as part of a unit on grammar. On the whole, teachers found that small group activities were difficult for students because they lacked the skills necessary to function independently and productively as a group. They were more accustomed to sitting in rows with a lecturing teacher at the front of the classroom.

Although teachers at Ellis Bay were not organized into interdisciplinary teams, MGAP prompted some teachers to coordinate their instruction and assignments across subject areas.

Although the team identified group and discussion skills among sixth graders as a priority, no school-wide effort to teach those skills has been initiated. However, some individual teachers have worked with their own students on these prerequisite skills.

Although teachers at Ellis Bay were not organized into interdisciplinary teams, MGAP prompted some teachers to coordinate their instruction and assignments across subject areas. One language arts teacher assigned writing topics in conjunction with her students' science classes. Reciprocally, the science teacher paid close attention to grammar and spelling in students' written work. This coordination added coherence to both the students' and the teachers' work and reinforced the subject matter in both classes.

Two-and-a-half years after MGAP began at Ellis Bay, staff members rarely mentioned MGAP by name anymore, but vestiges of its philosophy and process have been woven into the daily life of the school. It is in the area of academic effectiveness, the assessment team's top priority, that MGAP has become most integrated into the culture of the school. In 1982 the state legislature mandated that, beginning with the 1983-84 school year, principals would regularly evaluate all teachers using a form developed by the state education department. After studying the state evaluation form, Team Leader Dwyer recognized some criteria common to the form and MGAP observation and interview questions. Dwyer and Rawlings decided to create an explicit linkage between the MGAP criteria and the teacher evaluation criteria. By this time the MGAP classroom observations had been completed, so the distinction between teacher evaluation and classroom observation for planning purposes remained clear to both administrators and teachers.

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Dwyer produced a form that delineated the shared criteria. Through workshops and regular staff meetings, she and the principal used this form to alert teachers to the criteria and to the specific behaviors the principal would look for in evaluating them. Before the evaluations began, teachers understood why the shared criteria were important and knew they would be held accountable for meeting them.

Making the connection between MGAP and mandated teacher evaluation produced a double effect at Ellis Bay. It enabled the staff to see the purpose for doing a self-assessment using MGAP, and it ensured follow-through on MGAP plans related to instruction. "There are so many things coming at the teachers from different directions, and the mandated teacher evaluations made them see the value of MGAP," Dwyer said. MGAP went a step further in linking the teacher evaluation criteria directly to students' needs and to instruction at Ellis Bay; through MGAP,

teachers learned the rationale behind a number of the items on which they would be evaluated. Rawlings found the MGAP criteria and measures to be objective and student-centered. They could be understood by teachers much better than what he called the "more mysterious and bureaucratically derived criteria" of many mandated evaluation instruments.

Gains in Student Achievement

Ellis Bay's emphasis on improving instruction has led to recognized improvement in academic effectiveness as measured by standardized test scores. Perhaps most impressive was the movement of 10 percent of the students in the bottom quartile up to the second quartile. In fact, the school earned a $12,295 incentive grant from the state for its achievement gains and its 20 percent increase in student attendance. After Ellis Bay was notified in the fall of 1985 that it would receive the grant, Rawlings appointed a committee of parents and teachers to decide how to spend the money. According to Rawlings, that committee is an example of another major outcome of MGAP at Ellis Bay. MGAP confirmed for him that he needs the ideas of many people in making important decisions, and that staff and parents are more supportive of decisions they help make.

A key to the success of MGAP at Ellis Bay was Rawlings' ability to recognize and use the talent of his teaching staff. He deferred to the team leaders throughout the assessment process, and after the assessment concluded, he continued to rely on them as a "think tank" for new ideas and solutions to problems. The team leaders agreed that Rawlings' constant encouragement and support were essential to specific changes that occurred and to the integration of MGAP into ongoing teacher evaluation. Pride for these accomplishments is shared by Dwyer and assistant team leaders Whitfield and Godfrey, who provided the leadership for their implementation. Rawlings says that MGAP has given him "something to hold on to when these people are gone." Since MGAP, Dwyer has entered the district's principal intern program; Whitfield is completing her doctorate; and Godfrey has moved to another city. Rawlings is left with a direction for the school, a mandated teacher evaluation system that is understood and accepted by his remaining faculty, and a stronger sense of the value of involving teachers and parents in decision making.

Case Study

Northwest Junior High School: Rallying Staff to Work toward Change

Background

Northwest Principal Raymond Oberman had ambitious goals in conducting an assessment using MGAP. He hoped to reacquaint the faculty with its power, to tease out any festering problems, and to develop strength through teamwork. He was also looking for insights to help the school change from its current grades 7–9 structure to a grades 5–8 configuration. Oberman also had a personal goal: since he had been at the school only one year, he hoped to gain a better understanding of how teachers, parents, and students perceived him and the school.

According to Northwest's assessment team, the school was "in turmoil" prior to Oberman's arrival the previous year. Oberman was the school's fourth principal in five years. When he arrived, Northwest had one of the highest student absentee rates in the system and the highest teacher absentee rate. On achievement tests, 60 percent of the school's 721 students scored below the national norm. In his first year at the school, Oberman successfully led an effort to increase test scores and decrease student absentee rates. In that year, the school's reading test scores went from 26th in the district to third. Oberman saw MGAP as a way to enlist the support of all the teachers in his efforts and in future school improvement projects.

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Oberman enlisted two teachers, Alice Meyers and Jane Farmer, to become MGAP team leaders. They were also leaders of the school's Staff Led Team, a panel that advised the principal and planned activities related to school improvement. However, in selecting them Oberman still did not fully commit Northwest to an MGAP assessment. After the training session for team leaders conducted by the Center for Early Adolescence, Meyers and Farmer

advised Oberman that they believed the process had potential to help the school and that they should proceed by presenting MGAP to the Staff Led Team, which they decided should also function as the assessment team. Oberman agreed.

Addressing Faculty Skepticism

During the few previous years, Northwest had been involved almost continuously in one school improvement activity after another – most of them initiated by the central office. The general consensus among the school's staff was that most of the efforts had been a waste of time. Thus it was not surprising that when Meyers and Farmer presented MGAP to the team, its members wondered if MGAP would be another time-consuming and frustrating exercise in futility. After lengthy discussion, the team decided to begin MGAP with the understanding that it could quit the process at designated "bail-out" points if the group agreed that it would not be worth the time to continue.

The team training was held in November 1983 and led by Kevin Stovall, who served as MGAP consultant at Northwest. Team leader Meyers took an active role in the training and was essentially in charge of the process by the third and final day. Oberman arranged for all team members to be relieved of teaching duties during the session. By the end of the training, team members expressed genuine enthusiasm for the process.

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To garner school-wide support for MGAP, the assessment team spent two weeks promoting the program at faculty meetings and in casual conversations. They left a copy of the User's Manual in the faculty lounge so that teachers could review MGAP's conceptual basis as well as the observation and interview forms. Once the team members' enthusiasm and obvious respect for the faculty's concerns had helped to gain teacher acceptance for the program, data collection began. In all, team members observed 14 classrooms and interviewed 105 teachers and

school staff members including maintenance, security, and kitchen workers, parents, and students. Several teachers who were interviewed were thrilled at the opportunity to voice their thoughts. Parents who were interviewed continued to call the school for weeks afterward with additional comments.

Throughout the data gathering process, Oberman strongly supported the team but did not take an active role as a team member. In addition to publicly stating his support for the assessment, he made tangible commitments to MGAP, providing the class coverage, supplies and secretarial support the team needed to do its work.

Principal's Role

When the team presented its results to Oberman in January 1984, he was surprised by the finding that about half the faculty did not perceive him as an instructional leader. Oberman accepted responsibility for improving his role in this area. According to Meyers, Oberman has become a stronger instructional leader in the two years following MGAP. He visits classes frequently and knows what is going on in the classrooms, which Meyers says has helped show teachers that "they are not standing alone." Now that teachers feel much freer to go to him with instructional and behavioral problems, and he has proved he will help find solutions. Oberman also accepts teachers' suggestions and solicits their help in working out solutions to instructional and management problems. For example, when the librarian position became vacant, teachers urged Oberman to hire someone who would be an instructional resource for them and who would welcome students into the library. They complained that previous librarians had placed so many restrictions on the use of the library that neither students nor teachers used it. In response, Oberman handpicked a new school librarian who has made the library easily and pleasantly accessible to Northwest's students and staff.

School-Wide Discipline Plan

Another finding that surprised Oberman was that behavior and order in the school deteriorated on days when he was absent. Together, he and the assessment team decided that the root of the problem was the lack of a

consistent school-wide discipline policy and the fact that some teachers referred all misbehaving students to the principal's office, creating problems when he was out of the building. After soliciting ideas from the faculty, the assessment team developed a plan to produce and implement a comprehensive discipline policy. The policy spelled out school rules and the consequences of breaking them; moreover, it clearly stated that all staff members would be responsible for enforcing the rules. The policy also specified the offenses for which students could be referred to the principal.

When a draft of the plan was presented to the two assistant principals, they resisted on the grounds that the new plan would require more work of them. When Meyers pointed out that the plan had the firm backing of the principal, the assistants agreed to go along with it. Without Oberman's backing, the assistant principals might have scuttled the plan, even though many teachers who had been uninvolved in MGAP endorsed the discipline plan enthusiastically.

By early in the second semester of the 1983–84 school year, the faculty had fully implemented the discipline plan. At the end of the year, Meyers reported, "The general tone of the building has changed. There is a sense that the faculty is gaining the upper hand, that the students are accepting the policy and testing teachers much less, and that discipline is now considered to be firm, fair, and consistent."

The assessment team also initiated programs to recognize student achievement and good behavior with special movies, breakfasts, assemblies, and permission for greater freedom of movement within the school. By providing incentives for good behavior and corrective measures for unacceptable conduct, the faculty balanced the discipline policy's emphasis on enforcement of rules with highly visible and desirable rewards for

By providing incentives for good behavior and corrective measures for unacceptable conduct, the faculty balanced the discipline policy's emphasis on enforcement of rules with highly visible and desirable rewards for positive behavior.

positive behavior. The underlying need for the plan—to make student and staff behavior less dependent upon the principal—had been successfully addressed. Meyers reported that discipline had become a shared responsibility; Oberman was no longer a "one-man show."

At the beginning of the 1985–86 school year, Northwest's Staff Led Team banned corporal punishment, with broad support from the faculty. Oberman, who personally favored corporal punishment, wanted to give the faculty-supported policy a chance. When the faculty reviewed the policy at the end of one semester, they concluded that the policy was working for 90 percent of Northwest's students, but that there was "something missing" for the other 10 percent. Although the faculty decided to reinstate corporal punishment, with strict guidelines, Meyers thinks some teachers have discovered that they do not need to paddle. By better understanding their early adolescent students, teachers built a better rapport with students and found more effective ways of talking with them about their behavior. MGAP created constructive debate and experimentation that reduced the number of teachers who use corporal punishment and helped teachers discover alternative discipline techniques.

Supporting Student Achievement

Recognizing the crucial roles that parents play in supporting student achievement and in dealing with behavior problems, the assessment team noted that teachers needed to interact more with parents. Beginning in the 1984–85 school year, a group of teachers made evening phone calls to the homes of all students who were absent from school that day to ask if there were anything the school could do to help the students catch up. Interestingly, parents often used this opportunity to raise their concerns about their children's progress. The effort has led to an increased willingness among parents to call and visit the school. "Last year we would have been lucky to have 20 for parent conferences," Meyers said in the spring of 1985, "and we had 200 this year."

Students' average daily attendance has also increased dramatically in the past two years, from 72 percent in 1982–83 to 89 percent in February 1985. Meyers pointed out that system-wide problems with bus drivers have not

deterred students from coming to school; they have used public transportation. Teacher attendance also is much better. Two years ago, Northwest averaged 13 teacher absence days in each two-week period; that number has been cut to four. While in the past it was difficult, if not impossible, to get substitutes; now there is almost no problem. Also, students' test scores are rising; the percentage of Northwest's students who tested below the national norm has fallen from 60 percent in 1983 to 26 percent in 1985.

Long-Term Impact Doubtful

Despite these successes, Meyers, Oberman, and the team members have reservations about the long-term impact of MGAP at Northwest. In December 1984, Kevin Stovall, Northwest's MGAP consultant, returned to the school to examine the immediate and potential long-range impact of MGAP. Oberman told Stovall that although he considered MGAP significant in making many of the changes at Northwest, he was not hopeful about long-term impact because actions taken by the central Board of Education may minimize MGAP's effect. As a prime example, Oberman cited the board's indecision regarding the system's transition from grades 7–9 junior high schools to grades 5–8 middle schools. For several years, the board has sporadically announced and then withdrawn dates for the transition, and has also repeatedly changed the proposed grade configurations and names of the new schools.

According to Oberman, the Board's attitude and inaction have created a climate of indifference among the faculty. When the transition plan is implemented, teachers do not expect to know their school assignments until a month before school starts. They see no point in making changes that may evaporate with staff turnover or fluctuating district mandates. Some teachers are drawing away from sponsoring clubs and other students activities because they do not want to invest themselves

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for one year only to be uprooted the next. Stovall summarizes, "MGAP served its purpose in addressing key issues and getting the faculty to perceive many of the problems as their own. However, the system itself seems to work against change. The forces that are inherent in the system are too powerful to be ignored."

Stovall also observed that Northwest teachers had long experienced a keen sense of desperation, and MGAP aroused false or unrealistic expectations. Some teachers idealized the assessment process as an external force that would liberate them from all the negative forces that have impact upon their day-to-day functioning as teachers. When they realized that MGAP is a process of internal change and is dependent on staff effort, some felt disappointed and retreated to their old attitudes, contending that MGAP had made little difference in their school. Meyers and a few other team members express the minority view that MGAP has made a difference at Northwest. In February 1985, Meyers said, "If the follow-up survey were taken today, the answers would be more positive. The mistake many team members made was thinking everything would happen at once." Stovall attributes these differing views of the impact of MGAP to varying levels of expectations and personal gain among team members. For example, from the beginning Meyers was realistic about the changes that could take place. Also, she experienced personal and professional growth as she developed new strengths and talents as the team leader.

Northwest is a school led by a principal who has a track record for turning schools around. It is staffed by teachers who genuinely want a better environment for teaching and learning. MGAP showed that, given a structured, participatory process and support from the principal, Northwest's teachers could rally from their despair and work toward constructive change. Meyers says that MGAP gave the school a mirror that reflected an unflattering portrait. The teachers know they must change the picture. However, some staff members' unrealistic

MGAP showed that, given a structured, participatory process and support from the principal, Northwest's teachers could rally from their despair and work toward constructive change.

expectations for a "quick fix" and the Board of Education's inconsistent actions combine to dim the prospects for lasting organizational change.

It seems the momentum brought about by MGAP will continue, at least to some degree, as long as Oberman and Meyers are at Northwest. Both believe, however, that their secondary credentials make it likely that they will be moved to high schools as a part of the organizational restructuring, even though Meyers has requested to remain at Northwest. While both have worked diligently for change, they have been unable to counter the uncertainty and disengagement among staff that has resulted from district-level decision making.

Case Study

Newman Middle School: Persisting toward the Realization of a Vision

Background

Newman Middle School, an inner-city school drawing students from its immediate neighborhood and other areas of the city, was in a period of transition when it began its MGAP assessment in the fall of 1982. All middle-grade schools in the district had just been expanded from grades 7–8 to a 6–8 grades configuration. The change brought more than 200 additional students and eight staff members to Newman, making three-quarters of its 500 students and one-third of its faculty new to the school. About two-thirds of the student body was black, and most of the others were white. Slightly more than half were eligible for free lunches. Test scores indicated that, on the average, students were performing below grade level. With the shift to a middle school configuration, Newman had incorporated some new programs, including a regularly scheduled activity period for students, career exploration courses, and team teaching.

Principal Nick Lattin recognized MGAP's philosophy as consistent with his own and his school district's view of middle-grade schools. Lattin, who was instrumental in the school system's move to middle schools, had been gradually introducing middle school philosophy and practices at Newman for four years. He believed MGAP was a tool that would increase the staff's understanding of the students, help the school develop a program that reflected the developmental and academic needs of young adolescents, and pave the way for ongoing, non-threatening assessment within the school.

Lattin decided that he and Assistant Principal Sue Gleason would be Newman's MGAP team leaders. The media coordinator and the seven teachers who formed the school's instructional coordinating team served as assessment team members. The team completed the observation and interviewing phase of the assessment early in December 1982, having interviewed 18 teachers (all the school's staff except assessment team members), 21 parents, 18 students, the guidance counselor, and Lattin. The team also observed all of the school's classrooms.

Before the 1982 winter break, team members identified three areas as their top priorities for improvement—structure and limits, competence and achievement, and academic effectiveness—and listed some possible ways to meet needs in these areas. In January, Newman's team reported its findings to the school's entire staff, who discussed it and made additional recommendations for action. Although the team did not produce a plan of action, Lattin and Gleason used the findings and recommendations to bring the school closer to Lattin's vision of an ideal middle school. Under their leadership, the school has made important strides toward improvement in the three priority areas identified by the team.

Although the team did not produce a plan of action, Lattin and Gleason used the findings and recommendations to bring the school closer to Lattin's vision of an ideal middle school.

Providing Structure and Clear Limits

First, Lattin and Gleason implemented a plan designed to give students a clear sense of structure and limits. Members of the administrative staff went into each homeroom at the beginning of the school year to talk about expectations, rules, and consequences of infractions. Lattin also developed a four-step plan for dealing with the small core of students who were repeatedly breaking rules. He reported in the late fall of 1983 that the plan, based on suspension and parent involvement, already had "straightened out 18 to 20 students." In the fall of 1985, he revised the plan by adding a new first step—with a student's first referral to the office, his or her parent was telephoned to discuss the student's recurring classroom behavior problems. According to Gleason, this early contact with parents produced better behavior among all students, including those who had repeatedly broken rules the previous year.

Promoting Competence and Achievement

Second, Lattin and Gleason mounted a campaign to recognize students' positive behavior and performance as a way to promote competence and achievement. They began by restructuring the end-of-year awards program to emphasize accomplishments other than athletics. The MGAP

team had noted that athletic awards far outnumbered and overshadowed any others presented. In 1984 trophies and awards were given, for the first time, for academic achievement, perfect attendance, and individual accomplishments, such as being the chess tournament champion. Plaques listing the names of students who won the major non-athletic awards were permanently installed in the school's trophy case, which previously contained only athletic prizes.

Newman also has begun school-wide competitions in academic areas, such as quiz bowl contests in mathematics and social studies, a spelling bee, and a science fair. In addition, Lattin has given students prominent roles in assembly programs and activities involving guests at the school. For example, student council and Beta Club members are marshals for these special events. "We're trying to push scholars and well-behaved students to the forefront," Gleason says. "One of the most important things that came out of MGAP is that teachers are aware that academic success should be our focus."

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The assessment team's report also suggested that both students and parents needed to hear more positive comments from teachers. The teachers began a concerted effort to send notes home to parents about their children's accomplishments and to give students verbal and written acknowledgements of their positive behavior on a daily basis. Gleason observed in the spring of 1984 that although some teachers had been doing this for a while, MGAP transformed these occasional incidences into a unified school effort. The effort carried over into the next school year, with most teachers continuing to send home words of praise. Lattin is convinced that the school's continuing emphasis on recognizing academic performance and positive behavior is one of the factors contributing to a slight increase in achievement test scores.

In selecting academic effectiveness as one of Newman's priority needs, the assessment team noted that there was

a group of students who were failing repeatedly. In their MGAP interviews, teachers said it did not make sense to hold the students back and repeat a strategy that obviously was not working. Newman already had instituted an Alternate Learning Center where students having difficulty in the regular classroom could work for a few days, weeks or an entire grading period until they were ready to return to the regular school program. But some students needed something more. In the 1983–84 school year, Newman added a highly structured program for under-achievers where teachers also served as advisers, offering individualized attention and focusing on the students' most immediate needs, whether academic or social. Students in the program, which was named "FOCUS," had their core classes together, but were dispersed for unified arts and electives.

"FOCUS" served 50 sixth and seventh graders its first year; in its second year, it was reserved for seventh and eighth graders because Lattin did not think the information he received from the elementary schools was adequate to screen sixth graders for the program. Although Lattin believed the program had helped some of its participants overcome academic deficiencies and deal with personal problems that impeded learning, the program was dropped for the 1985–86 school year. The primary problem was a lack of consensus regarding who should be in the program: some teachers felt that over half of their students belonged in the FOCUS program. Also, Lattin and Gleason believed that under-achieving students need positive modeling from their higher-achieving peers, which they cannot get when they are separated into FOCUS classes.

Improving Instruction

Lattin and Gleason refocused their efforts to improve academic effectiveness to center on the school's adoption of the "Teacher Effectiveness Training" program. Gleason says that the program, which emphasizes techniques for reinforcing students' positive accomplishments and for sharing successful techniques among teachers, builds on the foundation of responsiveness and teamwork laid by MGAP. "Teachers helping each other is something MGAP helped establish at this school," she says.

According to Gleason and Lattin, MGAP also established a heightened level of responsibility for identifying

and solving problems among the faculty. Lattin had chosen the school's natural leaders to serve on the initial instructional coordinating team, which doubled as the MGAP team. Their experience with MGAP gave them new responsibilities for identifying the school's strengths and weaknesses and for devising solutions to problems. Continuing to discuss the team's findings and recommendations, they contribute information and suggestions to address school concerns. The director of staff development for the district says the Newman teachers who served on the MGAP team are more vocal at district meetings than other teachers, freely asking questions or raising concerns about central office initiatives. She attributes their new assertiveness to the fact that "they have established what their school needs and what it takes to get it."

Their experience with MGAP gave them new responsibilities for identifying the school's strengths and weaknesses and for devising solutions to problems.

Effects of Redistricting

In Gleason's words, the biggest obstacle Newman faced until the beginning of the 1985–86 school year was the inability to "settle down." Since Newman had plenty of space while some of the district's other middle schools were crowded, 225 students were redistricted to the school at the beginning of the 1984–85 school year. With the students came 12 new teachers. "Things are in such a state of change that it is hard to stop and look at where we are," said Gleason in the spring of 1985.

The 1984 redistricting was much more disruptive than Newman's original transition to a middle school in 1982; it is an example of how external forces can overwhelm a school. The earlier reorganization had been thoroughly discussed and planned. In contrast, the redistricting decision came late—in July—and it was not part of a larger plan. Many students and parents came to the school with anger and animosity, according to Lattin. These bad feelings led to many more discipline problems during the 1984–85 year than in the previous year; 50 percent of the students referred to the office for disciplinary reasons were new to the building. According to Gleason, their disruptive

behavior was an expression of dissatisfaction about being transferred. "Each time we have had such a change, it has taken a while to settle down," she said. By the opening of school in the fall of 1985, those students had severed their ties with their former schools and felt better about being at Newman, Gleason said.

In response to an MGAP recommendation, and coinciding with his personal philosophy and the influx of new students, Lattin established a PTA at the beginning of the 1984–85 school year. In its first year, the PTA's 40 dues-paying members held three meetings, including a program on the school's curriculum. The next school year saw an increase in membership and a slate of eight meetings with a growing attendance throughout the year. In a further effort to involve and inform parents, the school began to offer more programs and activities (such as concerts, regular parent-teacher conference days, and special ceremonies) that brought parents into the school.

Since 1982 Newman has seen many changes—in grade configuration and program, in the doubling of the teaching staff, and in the addition of more than 200 new students in 1982 and again in 1984. Programs have been tried, modified, and sometimes discontinued. Amidst these unsettled conditions, two factors have remained constant: Lattin's vision for the school and MGAP's modest but persistent inroads toward enabling Newman to realize that vision.

Lattin recommends MGAP to schools that are entering a middle school transition because it can be used to point out where a school needs to change and where it already is responsive to its young adolescent students. Also, the MGAP materials and the team's recommendations provide building-level direction for district-mandated change. According to Lattin, the characteristics and needs of young adolescents on which MGAP is based are "on-target," and "give teachers added insight into the age group."

Case Study

Morgan Middle School:
Buying into a Direction

Background

Principal Mark Herring considered Morgan Middle School a good school when it began the MGAP process in the fall of 1982, but he believed it could be even better if it took on a new direction and vigor. Located in a small southeastern town, Morgan had been a grades 6–8 school for more than a decade but had called itself a junior high until the year before. Its 550 students—two-thirds white and most of the others black—were squeezed into a facility built for about 300 high school students. Test scores indicated that, on the whole, students were performing at or above grade level. Discipline problems, as measured by the number of expulsions and suspensions, had declined over the three years preceding the assessment. Through MGAP, Herring hoped to gain information that would help the school match its practices to young adolescent students' developmental characteristics. He also hoped to develop more parent and community involvement, staff expertise in assessment skills and techniques, and positive exposure for the school and school system in the community and the state.

Herring decided that he and Monica Chase, a teacher who was known for her leadership ability in the school, would lead Morgan's assessment team. Together, they selected the rest of the team: four other teachers, three parents, one community representative, and a member of the school system's central office staff. The Morgan team was aided in the MGAP process by the State Department of Education's middle-grades specialist, Eugene Barron. Barron attended meetings, made suggestions about organizing the assessment, and provided an outside perspective on the team's findings, conclusions, and possible actions. However, he did not intrude into the team's decision making. "If they had done something because I told them to, they would have quit as soon as I left," he said.

Assessment Process

Herring made three wise decisions early in the MGAP

process. First, to demonstrate that MGAP was an important project for the school, he began the assessment team training with a dinner meeting attended by the superintendent, several members of the central office staff, and Barron.

Second, he decided that he would not conduct interviews or observations in order to avoid possible conflict between his roles as an assessment team member and as a supervisor/evaluator. Each of the other 10 team members observed three classrooms and interviewed at least four people. As a team, they spent a month observing all 29 of Morgan's classrooms, and interviewing 11 teachers, 15 students, 13 parents, Herring, and the guidance counselor.

Third, Herring involved the entire faculty in developing responses to the team's findings. When data collection was completed, Chase led the team members in discussing their findings and in formulating recommendations. A team report was presented to Herring in January 1983. Herring then divided the entire school faculty into nine committees, one for each of the MGAP criteria. Using the MGAP report as a starting point, each committee prepared a plan of action for school improvement in its assigned area. The committee leaders presented their plans to the entire staff and then worked with Herring to determine how and when the recommendations would be implemented. Some changes were earmarked for implementation before the end of the 1982–83 school year, others were to be started that year and completed the following year, and still others were set as goals to be achieved over the next three years.

Using the MGAP report as a starting point, each committee prepared a plan of action for school improvement in its assigned area.

Morgan immediately made some small but important changes in response to specific findings. For example, the assessment team had observed that because of traffic congestion, students were not physically safe when arriving at or leaving the school. A group of staff members developed a new schedule for dismissing students, staggering the departure of those who rode buses and those who walked or came in cars. The team had also recommended

that improved communication between teachers and parents be a top priority and noted that a second school telephone located in a quiet, private place was needed. In response, the school's PTA provided a separate telephone line in the teachers' lounge for staff members to use for calling parents. According to Chase, teachers continued to use the telephone regularly to call parents more than two years after its installation.

Adviser/Advisee Program

In the spring of 1983, Morgan's staff also began working on recommendations slated to be fully implemented the following year. For example, to meet young adolescents' needs for self-definition and social interaction, a group of teachers developed an adviser-advisee program aimed at offering a positive, caring environment for students. With the assistance of a graduate-student intern from a local university, a group of teachers developed a curriculum for the new program which focused on personal growth and interpersonal relationships. In 1984–85, the staff revised the program slightly, combining the homeroom and advisee periods and assigning advisees to all the school's teachers, including resource teachers. As a result of these changes, the number of students assigned to each adviser was reduced from an average of 27 to 20. Some homeroom/advisory groups began to work together on service projects, such as "adopting" residents in a nearby retirement home or working with children in Head Start. In response to teachers' requests for longer blocks of time with their advisee groups, the advisee group meetings were moved to the lunch/activity period at the beginning of the 1985–86 school year. The schools' experience with its adviser/advisee program illustrates how Herring and the faculty worked together over several years to design, implement, evaluate, and revise responses to the assessment team's findings.

Increasing Instructional Time

Similarly, Herring and the staff at Morgan have acted to strengthen the school's academic effectiveness. Perhaps the most far-reaching change has been in the area of student scheduling. It became apparent to the assessment team that many seventh graders were having trouble adjusting to changing classes and needed a less fragmented

schedule. To alleviate the problem, the seventh grade schedule was reorganized at the beginning of the 1984–85 school year to resemble the sixth grade schedule, which provided longer blocks of time in two core classrooms. Block scheduling was extended to eighth grade at the beginning of the 1985–86 year. Besides allowing students and teachers more time and opportunities to get to know each other, the scheduling also increases instructional time.

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The staff at Morgan has also revised the scheduling of students who need the extra help provided by resource teachers. The MGAP team expressed concern about pulling these students out of their regular classes for resource work. In response, the school scheduled resource time to minimize "pull out," and classroom and resource teachers began to work together to coordinate their teaching.

Morgan also worked to improve student learning by meeting another need identified in the assessment – the need for young adolescents to explore various career possibilities as they begin to think about their futures. For the 1984–85 school year, the school applied to the State Department of Education and was chosen as a site for a pilot vocational program. As part of this program, 30 seventh graders began taking special basic skills courses in the fall of 1984. The same number of eighth graders were added to the program for the spring 1985 semester. The pilot program was designed to help students who were having academic problems, but Herring knew from the outset that he wanted to expand it to all students. The state discontinued the program for the 1985–86 school year, but Herring persuaded the county school board to fund the salaries of the two teachers who had conducted the program. All of Morgan's seventh and eighth graders now participate in the pre-vocational program.

Herring felt the slight increase in achievement test scores from 1983 to 1985 could be attributed, at least in part, to the basic skills component of the pilot vocational program and the scheduling changes. To recognize students' achieve-

ment, he established an Honor Roll and Principal's List, and the school began to sponsor social activities, such as dances, as rewards for improved academic performance.

Herring acknowledges that he has not seen as much improvement in teaching as he would like. However, he observes that learning who young adolescents are and opening opportunities for faculty members to participate in planning school programs may well be prerequisites to changing the way teachers teach. Herring feels that he is now in a stronger, more comfortable position to move ahead with efforts to improve instruction. "You can bring in consultants all day long to talk about curriculum and instruction improvements," he said. "But teachers will slide back into their old ways. MGAP gives the staff an opportunity to buy into a direction. The administrator then has a lever to change behavior."

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Herring is also convinced that the faculty's work on MGAP prompted it to take more seriously Morgan's reaccreditation by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, which occurred during the 1983–84 school year. MGAP taught them skills that helped them to complete the accreditation self-study, and the reaccreditation report frequently cites MGAP as the rationale that undergirded their actions or their motivation for implementing innovations.

Planning Time

One of the most striking successes resulting from MGAP at Morgan arose from the teachers' need for daily planning time. Both MGAP and a subsequent teacher morale survey showed the need for planning time to be so critical that Herring became committed to applying any new resources toward meeting it. When the assessment was conducted, few teachers had regular planning time. By the 1984–85 school year, ninety percent of the faculty had at least some scheduled planning time. The following year, every teacher

had planning time, although sixth grade teachers still did not have it every day. Herring orchestrated the new prevocational program, the schedule changes, and the establishment of a physical education program in all three grades to accomplish the goal of planning periods for all teachers. His next goal is to schedule common planning time for teachers of the same students, during which they might share information about individual students' progress and plan interdisciplinary units.

Another critical need identified in the assessment – more physical space – has been difficult for Morgan to satisfy. Although two mobile classrooms have been added to the school during each of the past two years and the building's dining room has been enlarged, Morgan still is crowded. The facilities built for 300 high school students will remain inadequate as long as Morgan has 550 students.

Securing System and Public Support

One of the most helpful things MGAP did for Morgan, according to Herring, was to make the school system's central office take notice of the school. Herring actively kept the superintendent informed of the progress of the assessment and used MGAP to document the school's need for planning time for teachers and increased space. The superintendent now regards Morgan as the district's model middle school and takes visiting groups to tour it. Herring hopes this pride eventually will lead to the financial support necessary to implement planning periods and to expand facilities. In the meantime, the recognition from the central office is a boost for the school staff. Morgan's MGAP consultant, Barron, also sees an improved school image as an important outcome of the assessment. According to Barron, the community had not opposed anything Morgan was doing, but it had not paid much attention to the school, either. Several stories in local newspapers about the assessment and reports to the school board have focused positive public attention on the school. In addition, the citizens who served on the assessment team have spread the word that improvements are underway at the school.

Several stories in local newspapers about the assessment and reports to the school board have focused positive public attention on the school.

Barron saw MGAP as a tool that allowed Herring to accomplish his goals for school improvement at Morgan. Herring had read the middle school literature, visited other schools, and attended middle school conferences. The problem was that his staff was not as well-versed, and still maintained a traditional junior high or "mini high school" perspective. Herring needed a process to educate the staff and the community about effective middle schools and to demonstrate why Morgan would benefit from implementing some middle school practices. Before they would support Herring's new direction, however, the faculty needed evidence that he would respond to at least some of their present concerns and would draw them into decision making about future goals and activities. MGAP gave him that process, according to Barron, and it was successful because the entire faculty was involved in its implementation.

Barron sees Herring's initial and continuing enthusiasm for the middle school approach and the faculty's willingness to spend many hours on the program as essential to MGAP's success at Morgan. Perhaps most important is that the school's staff does not consider its improvement efforts to be finished. To ensure that the school's newer teachers also understand the plan, Herring uses the MGAP framework as an orientation tool. Herring is determined to keep Morgan moving "from the good school it already is to the best middle school in the state."

Case Study

Prescott Junior High School: Paving the Way for Change

Background

When Prescott Junior High School began MGAP in the fall of 1982, district administrators were anticipating a city-wide shift from grades 7–9 junior high schools to grades 6–8 middle schools by 1986. They hoped MGAP would be useful as a vehicle for preparing Prescott for this transition. At Prescott, Principal Harvey Nelson had four goals for conducting an assessment using MGAP:

- to provide a better learning environment for the school's 624 students;
- to improve instruction in the school;
- to improve relationships among the community, staff, and students; and
- to help staff members gain an understanding and acceptance of the early adolescent learner.

The assessment began with Nelson's selection of two ninth-grade teachers, Hilary McCann and Sydney Cummins, to be the assessment team leaders. From staff who volunteered to serve on the assessment team, McCann, Cummins, and Nelson selected five teachers and a media specialist. The team also included Assistant Principal Harriet Stoko, a parent, and a school psychologist assigned to Prescott part-time. George Hutchinson of the State Department of Education worked as consultant with the team. With his help, the team leaders successfully completed a one-day team training session at an off-campus location.

As the team began its interviews and observations, a serious setback occurred. A local newspaper ran a story on the improvement program under the headline, "Prescott Airs Dirty Laundry." Although the story itself was generally positive, the headline temporarily devastated the morale of the assessment team. Team members' first reaction was to stop the assessment immediately. After their initial discouragement, however, they became angry and more determined than ever to make MGAP successful. Nelson,

who wanted MGAP to help foster positive community interest in Prescott, was very upset with the headline and lost some of his enthusiasm for the assessment. The data collection proceeded as scheduled, however, with team members observing 27 classrooms and interviewing 27 teachers, 27 parents, and 36 students over a seven-week period.

Priorities for School Improvement

After reviewing all of its findings, the team prepared a report that outlined several specific recommendations for improving the school. For example, team members proposed that a discipline workshop be held at the beginning of the next school year, 1983–84, to provide school staff with new ideas about classroom discipline and to ensure that everyone began the year cognizant of the school's policies and rules. To improve academic effectiveness, the team suggested that communication across academic disciplines be increased. They called for the development of a master time line showing what every class in each academic area was studying throughout the year, and recommended that all teachers receive a copy of the time line so that they could coordinate and reinforce each other's lessons. Intrigued by the concepts of block scheduling and team teaching, the team also proposed an experimental math and science teaching block for the 1983–84 school year. Administrators, the team also said, should visit classrooms more often to strengthen their roles as instructional leaders. The team also identified several changes that would improve teacher morale.

To improve academic effectiveness, the team suggested that communication across academic disciplines be increased.

The assessment team was apprehensive about giving its report to Nelson because of its strong recommendations for raising teacher morale and improving Nelson's relationship with the faculty. According to Hutchinson, the team's apprehension was well-founded. When the team met with Nelson to present its report, he took the criticism of his administrative style very personally. MGAP might not have continued beyond that meeting if Hutchinson had not been present to help Nelson realize that he was reacting defensively.

Principal's Role

Nelson explained that he had stayed away from MGAP team meetings because he wanted the team to feel that it had the freedom to make an honest appraisal. Because he believed the assistant principal was keeping him up-to-date on the assessment, he was not expecting to hear anything he did not already know. Nelson also anticipated that he would have a hand in writing the assessment team report, even though he had not been directly involved in the assessment and had not explicitly told the team that he wanted to participate in preparing the report. The report was, in fact, revised with Nelson's input before he fully lent his support to the implementation of the team's improvement plan.

In accordance with the team's first recommendation, Nelson quickly moved to schedule the discipline workshop for the beginning of the 1983-84 school year. As a result of the workshop, a faculty committee developed specific rules for Prescott's students, which were incorporated into the student handbook. Stoko said, in the spring of 1985, that the majority of the teachers were still continuing to enforce the rules consistently, despite an increase of 200 students and several new teachers over the previous year's enrollment.

All of Prescott's administrators responded to the team's recommendation regarding periodic visits to classrooms beyond those scheduled for evaluation sessions. Nelson said the team's report made him more conscious of the concept of instructional leadership and of what teachers expected from him and other administrators. Before the assessment, he felt that as long as he provided an assistant principal who could "walk the halls, go into the classrooms, and help teachers with any concern," he was doing his job as instructional leader. MGAP made him aware that he "needed to be more involved in instruction," Nelson said. "It made me schedule myself so I could be out (in the building) more."

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Stoko noted that although teachers had recommended the move, they initially were uncomfortable with having administrators in their classes. Once she proved to them that she was not "spying" on them or formally evaluating their teaching, but trying to assist them, they became more accepting. According to McCann, most of Prescott's teachers eventually grew accustomed to having administrators visit their classrooms. At least some of the teachers began to approach Stoko as a resource, asking her for ideas and suggestions about teaching methods and materials and occasionally inviting her to teach a class.

Building School Pride

A number of changes aimed at improving faculty morale also were instituted. McCann and Stoko noted that Nelson made a conscious effort to improve communication with teachers by personally discussing with them their particular problems and issues of concern. In response to some teachers' complaints about assigned duty for athletic events, Nelson developed an informal compensatory time system. He also assisted teachers by successfully appealing to the school board for an attendance secretary and providing them with student assistants to help with odd jobs. The teachers appreciate the help given by the assistants, who in turn have an opportunity to participate in the school and to develop a personal relationship with their supervising teacher.

Some changes, while not directly related to the assessment team's recommendations, came about because MGAP raised awareness about the school environment and the needs of young adolescents. An example of this was a program begun in the fall of 1984 to increase pride in the school among teachers, students, and the community. Stoko, who was primarily responsible for the pride program, acknowledged MGAP's role in instituting the program. Although she never directly told herself, "I'm going to do this because of MGAP," the assessment made her more conscious of the effect the overall school environment has on teaching and learning. She came away from MGAP feeling that there were too many unhappy people at the school. The pride program was an attempt to rectify the situation by creating an atmosphere of caring among staff and students.

Prescott also initiated a series of activities to increase community pride in the school. A newsletter, written by a committee of teachers, was regularly distributed to elementary schools, churches, and other community organizations. And, through a lunch program held twice a month, 10 business people or school officials were invited to the school for lunch and a tour. Stoko noted that although the turnout was uneven, she had high hopes that the lunches eventually would build long-term community support for Prescott.

Several of the assessment team's recommendations have not been implemented, but neither have they been forgotten. Although the master time line showing specific topics being studied in subject area classes has not been prepared as anticipated, the school did institute an activities schedule that Nelson believes serves the same purpose. The schedule has helped teachers coordinate activities and avoid conflicts between test-scheduling and field trips.

The experimental math and science block the MGAP team recommended also has not been implemented. According to Nelson, fully implementing team teaching and block scheduling is not possible because of constraints imposed by district policies regarding "experimental" programs and by the school's current computer scheduling and bell systems. Clearly, he does not believe he has the freedom to accomplish the rescheduling necessary to implement the plan. Teachers of academically gifted students, however, began some interdisciplinary team teaching on a small scale in the 1984–85 school year. In anticipation of the change to team teaching that will accompany the transition to a 68 grade configuration, three teachers at Prescott are voluntarily experimenting with planning and teaching together. Unfortunately, the teaming is not being supported with block scheduling. The experiment has shown the teachers and Nelson that it is essential to give careful consideration to the composition of teacher teams and to provide in-service training on how to work together in teams.

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Obstacles to Improvement

It is evident that MGAP has had a significant impact at Prescott. However, its impact has been somewhat diminished by several obstacles. First, when Principal Nelson delegated total responsibility for the assessment to the two capable team leaders, he expected the assistant principal to keep him informed but did not establish clear lines of communication and responsibility. While the team leaders did an outstanding job, the effect of these actions was to create distance between the principal and the assessment. His lack of information regarding the day-to-day assessment culminated in his surprise and dismay at the team's report. Although he supported the team leaders and the team, he was not a driving force behind the assessment or the implementation of the team's recommendations.

A second obstacle to MGAP at Prescott was divisiveness among the staff members. The first evidence of this divisiveness surfaced in the reaction of non-team members to the team training being held away from the school on a school day. According to Stoko, the attitude was "Why are they getting out of class?" Teachers did not look at the team members as people who were working hard for the good of the school, but rather as teachers who were receiving special privileges. Another example of the staff's divisiveness occurred when Stoko, acting on a recommendation from the team, designed a bulletin board to recognize teachers who used new and creative teaching techniques or who contributed in a special way to the life of the school. The team's recommendation was in direct response to teachers' expressed desire for greater recognition of their efforts. Some teachers, however, complained that the bulletin board was unfair because it did not recognize **all** teachers, and as a result, the board was discontinued. The staff's divisiveness and the reactionary way in which some staff members responded to changes kept interest in and support of MGAP from extending beyond the assessment team. Although teachers have been implementing the team's recommendations, understanding

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of MGAP criteria has not become ingrained in their thinking.

A third limit to MGAP's potential at Prescott was the selection of ninth-grade teachers as team leaders who will no longer be at Prescott after it becomes a middle-grade school. Both Cummins and McCann acknowledge that before MGAP, they opposed the system's decision to reorganize the grade configuration in its schools. MGAP helped them and other teachers understand early adolescent students and the changes needed in the existing junior high schools. Interestingly, prior to the assessment, neither team leader questioned that he/she would move to a high school when the transition occurred. MGAP revived their interest in young adolescents and piqued their curiosity about how to make Prescott both academically effective and developmentally responsive. Although her experience with MGAP made her consider staying at Prescott, Cummins left in August 1984 to teach at the high school level. McCann planned to follow when the junior high school's ninth graders are moved to the high school.

MGAP Partially Successful

Despite these obstacles, MGAP was at least partially successful at Prescott. The assessment gave the school's administrators insights into the instructional leadership function. In addition, MGAP paved the way for making major changes to the school's interpersonal climate and for experimenting with programs that probably will be mandated when Prescott becomes a middle school.

The assessment also had an extraordinary influence on Stoko, and through her, on the school and the district. Her assignment to Prescott was her introduction to school administration after many years of teaching high school. Stoko credits MGAP with giving her the background on early adolescence she needed to perform her job well. Her experience at Prescott also enabled her to become an active member of the district's middle school task force, which was planning the transition of the district's junior highs to middle schools. Subsequently, she has become the superintendent's administrative assistant in charge of implementing the transition. The entire middle school task force has felt the impact of MGAP; task force members, top level administrators, and school board members have

used the MGAP framework and assessment instruments as a resource in their planning and decision making.

Nelson, Stoko, McCann, and Cummins all concur that MGAP broadened their and other staff members' horizons and readied Prescott for change. "To grow, you have to examine and evaluate, and MGAP allowed Prescott to begin doing that," Stoko said. Thus, Nelson believes the school has been primed to make the transition to middle schools and that, thanks to the assessment, the staff has some ideas about where and how to start.

Case Study

Howard Daly Middle School: Missed Opportunities

Background

When Howard Daly Middle School began MGAP in the spring of 1983, it had spacious, one-year-old facilities that would be the envy of many schools. Within one large building, the school housed 42 classrooms, a gym, a "cafetorium", ten offices, guidance and special education departments, a media center, a lounge, a general work room, a science lab, and three teacher work rooms. MGAP would provide a look at what was going on inside the impressive new building. Specifically, the assessment team hoped to gain a thorough understanding of what each department was doing, the school's weaknesses and strengths, and ideas for raising the academic level of Daly's students. Principal Andrew Huffman's goal was to use the information obtained through the assessment to improve student achievement, school and community relations, and the administration of the school.

Established in 1972, Daly served 572 6–8 grade students from a 550 square mile rural area. Ninety-two percent of its students were minority, almost all of them black, and 84 percent were eligible for free lunches. About two-thirds of the school's students scored below the average range on achievement tests, but scores were rising slowly.

Huffman chose Gloria Pankuk, a science teacher, and Theresa Schuman, a learning disabilities teacher, as Daly's assessment team leaders. After attending a training session for MGAP leaders in January 1983, Pankuk and Schuman presented MGAP at a faculty meeting and invited teachers to volunteer to serve on the team. Schuman and Pankuk chose six teachers and the school guidance counselor from staff members who volunteered; Huffman also served on the team. Next, the team leaders conducted training for the team, which was, according to Huffman, "the most successful in-service ever

Using the MGAP interview forms, the ten team members interviewed every member of the school's staff, including custodians, lunchroom workers, and office personnel.

held at our school because of its clear focus on young adolescent students and its structure as a comprehensive assessment and improvement process."

Conducting the Assessment

By the time the team was ready to begin gathering data, its enthusiasm for the assessment was high. Using the MGAP interview forms, the ten team members interviewed every member of the school's staff, including custodians, lunchroom workers, and office personnel. (The head custodian later incorporated MGAP concepts into a training session for her staff.) They initially interviewed a small random sample of students, but then student interest in the assessment snowballed and scores of students volunteered to be interviewed. Ultimately, team members interviewed 120 students. Parents' response to a letter explaining MGAP and asking for volunteers to be interviewed was just as overwhelming. According to Huffman, "We planned to survey 50 people who respresented a cross-section of the parent population but found that more were waiting to be surveyed, so we included them and ended up with comments from about 200 of our parents."

The parent interviews were a convenient way to introduce the new school building to the community and in turn, provided an opportunity for community residents to voice their concerns to school staff. Apart from extracurricular activities, involvement in the MGAP interviews was the highest level of parental participation Daly had ever experienced. Even as much as a year later, Huffman continued to see increased numbers of parents coming to the school to confer with teachers. He repeatedly heard parents' comments that the MGAP interviews had been the first opportunity for them to express what they thought about the school and to suggest ways in which to improve it.

Because of the burgeoning number of interviews, it soon became apparent that the MGAP data collection would take longer than anticipated. Huffman asked the school's five regular substitute teachers, who already had been substituting for assessment team members, to donate two days each of teaching so that team members could complete the assessment. Caught up in staff, student, and parent excitement about the assessment, each of them enthusiastically agreed.

Immediate Effects

While the assessment team at Daly was conducting observations and interviews in the spring of 1983, Huffman began to recognize immediate effects on the school's staff. He saw more positive interaction between students and staff, and more specific behavioral objectives and detailed lesson plans from teachers. Likewise, Pankuk reported that the data gathering "helped to established some real communication between staff and students, staff and staff, and staff and administrators." For Huffman, MGAP illuminated his thinking in two crucial aspects of school management. First, he commented that MGAP "helped take the guesswork out of planning," and showed him the importance of involving staff, parents, and students in the planning process. Secondly, MGAP brought his attention to day-to-day details he had previously ignored and made him realize that these details have a real effect on teaching and learning.

Assessment Impact Undermined

Even though the assessment was generating new interest in the school and new insights into basic school practices, events that would eventually undermine its long-range impact were also taking place. In the late spring of 1983, the assessment team reported its findings and recommendations to the entire faculty, and asked teachers to study the report, rank the nine MGAP criteria in priority order, and return the report to the team. Unfortunately, the report was hastily distributed in the last 30 minutes of the school day. Teachers were poorly prepared to receive it or to complete their assignment. As a result, the team received few returns and the larger group was not drawn into the process of planning changes based on the team's findings. This failure eventually dealt a severe blow to the implementation of the team's action plan.

The team fell back on its own perceptions and those of the few staff members who returned their reports. They selected structure and limits as the first area for which they would develop and implement a plan of action. Over the summer, Huffman rewrote the school philosophy to be more easily understood by students and parents and prepared an attractive folder with the philosophy, school rules, and district discipline code printed on the inside. At

the opening of school, homeroom teachers distributed the folders to all students, and discussed the school philosophy as well as the school's rules and district policies.

However, the faculty failed to consistently implement the specific changes in discipline policy and procedures that were outlined in the plan of action. Pankuk attributed this lack of resolution to two factors. First, many of the faculty did not accept the plan because they were not involved in developing it—in fact, it was so poorly regarded that many ignored it. Second, teachers were not held accountable by the principal for implementing the changes called for by the plan. Teachers who initially followed the plan soon ceased their efforts when they saw the principal take no action in response to those who ignored the plan. Pankuk remained convinced that acting on the plan for improving structure and limits was a necessary prerequisite to acting on any of the other findings and recommendations of the assessment. She believed the team members needed concrete results from their efforts and staff members needed proof that the administration was serious about making changes.

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Unfortunately, the team was not to see results from their efforts. In the spring of 1984, one year after the assessment, Huffman conducted a two-day planning session for the next school year, involving selected staff members. Unfortunately, his agenda for the planning session made no connection with the assessment team's findings and recommendations; neither did it build on the energy that had been committed to MGAP. With this oversight, Huffman passed up opportunities to give year-to-year coherence to planning and to use MGAP as a lever for school improvement.

Residual Effects

Despite the institutional failure of MGAP at Daly, it did have significant impact on individuals. Huffman and Pankuk agree that MGAP raised individual staff members'

level of awareness about the needs of young adolescent students and helped them relate this understanding to day-to-day school practices. For example, in the fall of 1984, the school began its first yearbook and school newspaper, both undertaken by groups of students. Huffman points out that both of these activities would probably have been initiated without MGAP, but MGAP led the staff to view these activities as one way of meeting young adolescents' need to make meaningful contributions to their school. Likewise, staff appreciated the school's intramural games, begun in 1984, as an opportunity for students and teachers to get to know and enjoy each other. Pankuk says that MGAP gave her and other team members their first structured opportunity to share and learn from their colleagues. As a result, she sees more joint planning, sharing of materials, and constructive discussion about individual student progress and problems. She also found that studying the needs of young adolescents and exploring ways to meet them were very helpful to her in the classroom. "MGAP left me with a lot of things I can carry on forever," Pankuk says.

Pankuk says that MGAP gave her and other team members their first structured opportunity to share and learn from their colleagues.

Pankuk characterizes Daly as a school where things have been done the same way for a long time, where people complain but commit little energy to figuring out what could be done differently. She says MGAP prodded the assessment team, at least for a short while, to break down general, chronic complaints into specific manageable problems and to suggest alternate solutions.

Although both Pankuk and Huffman attribute to MGAP some specific changes in attitude and behavior, the prognosis for MGAP to result in lasting organizational change at Daly is poor because the principal failed to capitalize on opportunities at three critical points. First, there was no plan for broadening support for MGAP beyond the assessment team to include the entire staff. Second, staff members were not held accountable for implementing the plan to improve student behavior; failure to implement the structure and limits plan aborted action on the other proposed changes. Third, MGAP was compartmentalized

as a completed project, with no connections between MGAP and subsequent planning or school improvement activities. These three omissions came at critical transition points – broadening staff ownership for the findings and recommendations; implementing the first plan of action; and generalizing the MGAP experience to other school improvement efforts. The result was a lost opportunity to apply the forces that had been mobilized to achieving constructive, long-lasting improvement at Daly.

Case Study

Lakeview Middle School: Internal Conflict Defeats School Improvement Efforts

Background

In the Lakeview assessment report, which outlined an ambitious three- to five-year plan for school improvement, the assessment team stated: "Much work has gone into the MGAP process. Much more work needs to be done to accomplish what we have set out to do. However, the result will be a demonstrably better school for students, staff, parents, and the community in general." Unfortunately, the team accomplished only one point of its four-point school improvement plan before serious personnel problems unrelated to MGAP diverted the principal's and staff members' attention and efforts.

Principal Hal Pina came to Lakeview in the fall of 1980. According to Julie Pisanti, who served as the MGAP consultant at Lakeview and was familiar with the school's history, Pina "started at minus 10." The victim of severe funding cuts, personnel changes, and a month-long teacher strike, Lakeview was a school with a troubled history and an unsettled atmosphere. Pina spent his first 3 years at the school trying to make sense of the chaos and revitalize a demoralized staff. In 1983, test scores indicated that the majority of Lakeview's 671 6–8 grade students were performing well below grade level. A great many of them lacked basic reading and math skills. Nearly all of them were from minority racial and ethnic groups; 44 percent were Hispanic, and approximately 40 percent spoke English as a second language. Teachers speculated that the student body included a number of youth who were in the United States illegally. The vast majority—93 percent—of the students were eligible for free lunches.

Pina believed he needed financial help to meet the intense educational needs of Lakeview's students. Because the funding source he had targeted required a needs assessment as part of the grant proposal, he saw MGAP as a good first step in his application. The school's assessment team came up with a more far-reaching goal: to obtain information on what was positive and effective about the

school as well as what was lacking so that the staff could 1) effectively plan for improvement, and 2) establish better interaction among home, community, and school.

Selecting the Assessment Team

The principal selected two teachers as Lakeview's assessment team leaders on the basis of their interest in MGAP and their acceptance as leaders among school staff. These teachers, with Pina and Pisanti, introduced MGAP at a faculty meeting, and several teachers volunteered to serve on the assessment team. After a stringent two-month assessment time line was developed, some teachers dropped off the team. The team finally included Pina, Pisanti, ten teachers, and a parent who was chairperson of the school's Chapter 1 Advisory Committee.

The school's team members and the parent member, in particular, felt strongly that students should play a more active role in the assessment than merely submitting to interviews. As a result, the team decided to form a student assessment team to interview other students. The principal and Pisanti chose nine students, taking care to ensure representation across ethnic groups and a broad range of academic abilities. Pisanti trained the students in interview techniques, after which the group interviewed 35 randomly selected students using the MGAP questionnaire. After the interviews were completed, Pisanti led the group to reach conclusions and make recommendations. When the adult team met for sharing and summarizing, the students' findings were incorporated into their report. The creativity and energy the team showed in involving students was characteristic of its early work on the assessment.

Pisanti trained the students in interview techniques, after which the group interviewed 35 randomly selected students using the MGAP questionnaire.

Meanwhile, the regular assessment team observed all of Lakeview's teachers in classroom instruction and interviewed virtually all of the teachers, all paraprofessionals, and several parents.

Assessment Findings

The team's report made several general observations based on its findings. Lakeview's students and staff liked the school and each other. Students overwhelmingly said they felt the staff cared about them "a lot." However, there was no consensus among staff, parents, and students about a school philosophy or purpose that was specific to the school's unique and diverse population. The team also found that students, staff members, and parents had no idea how to participate in school decision making. Following these general observations, the report listed three priorities for improvement: academic effectiveness, meaningful participation, and structure and limits.

Before developing a plan of action, the team presented its findings to the entire faculty, asking members to suggest possible actions in the top priority areas. The reactions of the other faculty members surprised and disappointed the team. Some faculty members questioned the appropriateness of the assessment criteria and the accuracy of the team's findings. Many teachers felt that the report was too negative; others simply were indifferent to the assessment findings.

When team members reconvened to develop their long-range implementation plan, they decided to meet again with the teachers they originally interviewed to lobby for support for the plan. Team members, according to Pisanti, truly believed the MGAP implementation plan would help the school improve and were eager to help their colleagues overcome their skepticism. Their lobbying efforts, dedicated to making others see MGAP as a way to resolve some of the school's problems, yielded enough support to encourage them to continue implementing the plan.

Developing a School Philosophy

The first step the team took was to develop a statement of school philosophy and goals that would give direction and coherence to the long-range plan. Again, the team approached this task with thoughtfulness and creativity. They produced a carefully crafted philosophy that began with a stated purpose that could appear in any school philosophy—"to prepare young people to participate fully in their society." Recognizing the unique needs of the

school's diverse population, the philosophy continued by emphasizing basic skills, individualized instruction, self-esteem, positive cross-cultural experiences, and instruction for non-English-speaking students. The basis of the philosophy was that the school, home, and larger community must cooperate to ensure that each student experienced adequate academic growth. The team defined "adequate academic growth" as advancing through three grade levels during the three years spent at the school.

In embarking on the MGAP action plan, the team also began to produce a uniform student discipline policy and to communicate the policy to staff, parents, and students. A task force of staff, parents, and students, working with Pina, developed three broad expectations for students: "be academically prepared," "respect staff, students, and property," and "ensure the physical safety of yourself and others." At the beginning of the 1983 school year, students were greeted by bulletin boards, student handbooks, and homeroom discussions that explained why these three rules were important. At least six to eight specific behaviors were related to each rule and consequences for infractions were clarified. The committee also developed a referral process for chronic or serious violations. The approach to improving student behavior was positive, simple, and consistent. The quality of the team's work on the discipline policy matched their excellent work on the long-range school improvement plan and the philosophy statement. All three reflected the team members' talents, their desire to improve the school and their willingness to work toward that goal.

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Personnel Problems Defeat Assessment's Potential

Midway through the fall 1983 semester, a series of personnel problems began to plague Lakeview. Late in the previous school year, Pina had announced that he would be leaving the school for another assignment at the beginning of the 1983-84 school year. According to MGAP

consultant Pisanti, the reaction of the assessment team was, "It's all over." Then, a week before school was to start in the fall, Pina was reassigned to Lakeview, but five of the assessment team members, including the strongest leader, were assigned to other schools. The remaining team members probably could have revived the drive toward implementation of the school improvement plan had another personnel problem not come into play.

The previous spring, Pina had removed one of the school's guidance counselors, claiming that his behavior at times bordered on physical abuse of students. The faculty was divided over the removal; some agreed with Pina, but others felt the counselor had been effective. When school opened in the fall, the counselor returned to the school as a teacher and began to rally supporters against Pina. The divisiveness was exacerbated by the presence of two strong union groups among the faculty. The former counselor became the building representative for one; most of the remaining assessment team members were in the other. The former counselor's removal from his counseling position quickly became both a racial and a union issue, as well as a source of personality conflict between the two men. Any chance to garner broad-based support for MGAP was lost in the political shuffle.

In the fall of 1983, Pina said that MGAP had been a "very frustrating experience" for him. On the one hand, he saw it as a success because it had produced a thoughtful statement of school philosophy and a set of workable school discipline policies and procedures. The experience also had rejuvenated some staff members who gained new insight into what Lakeview could become. His greatest frustration was that there had been little action on the other three points outlined in the four-point long-range improvement plan.

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As the second point of their plan, the team had developed a group process model to be used in homerooms to structure student discussion and problem-solving about the operation of the school. Although some teachers were

using the model effectively, many were making few or no attempts to engage students in constructive discussion about school concerns. Action on the third point of the plan – to develop a report card with more information and a process for parent-teacher-student conferences – was postponed because district-level changes in the report card design were expected.

But Pina was most frustrated by the lack of effort on the fourth point, a plan to produce a school curriculum and to promote effective teaching in content areas. Weekly departmental meetings had begun, but Pina was disappointed that the meetings were not accomplishing their intended purpose of evaluating and redefining the curriculum. In October 1983, Pina was possessed by a driving concern for the 80 percent of his student body who were Chapter 1 eligible and who, for the most part, lacked basic reading and math skills necessary to undertake academic work on their grade level. He was attempting to match the grade-level curriculum with the ability of his students and to persuade all teachers to work on reading, writing, and vocabulary skills. Unfortunately, the deep divisions in the staff, coupled with Pina's frustration and inability to resolve the personnel problems, stymied progress.

According to Pisanti, Pina's commitment to MGAP began to erode as the personnel problems surfaced, first because of the intensity of the problems and secondarily because he had not truly adopted MGAP as a school improvement process. He had maintained that his key reason for conducting the assessment was to have a sound base for applying for grant funds. He cared more, Pisanti believed, about securing additional funds (which he believed were crucial to school improvement) than he did about implementing the assessment team's plan. Rebecca Bocanegra, a Lakeview parent and school administrator in the district, believes the problem was even more severe. The school staff, according to Bocanegra, never really supported the improvement plan, despite the assessment team's lobbying efforts.

The beginning of the 1984–85 school year found Pina and all but two of the MGAP team members assigned to other schools. Two threads of MGAP influence remained at Lakeview, however. First, the rules and discipline procedures, developed as recommended by the MGAP

assessment team, remained in effect. Second, in selecting a new principal, the on-site interview committee used the team's revised philosophy statement to introduce candidates to the school. The threads quickly unraveled, though, as the school's new principal chose not to adopt the assessment team's findings or the improvement plan.

Community Pressure

The subject of MGAP at Lakeview, however, was not yet closed. In the spring of 1985, a community leader called a public meeting attended by 200 community residents. She wanted to get to the root of the problems at Lakeview, which had just experienced a very chaotic year. One of the suggestions made at the meeting was to implement the plan from MGAP. The assessment was discussed again that summer and fall in a series of planning meetings about Lakeview's role in the system's desegregation consent decree. Pisanti thinks this continued interest in MGAP is evidence of its benefit to staff members and its residual effect at the school. At this point, the resurrection of Lakeview's MGAP improvement plan seems unlikely, but the school began the 1985–86 school year with yet another new principal who at least was interested in reviewing the assessment data and plan. Ironically, even if he wanted to make an all-out effort to implement the MGAP plan, it might not meet the school's present needs. Lakeview has had two new principals, experienced a large staff turnover, and been placed under a consent decree since it began MGAP less than three years ago. Bocanegra thinks the school might benefit from doing MGAP again, but only if the whole staff agreed at the beginning that an assessment would be beneficial.

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In any case, it appears that the situation at Lakeview is likely to improve. There now is community pressure for something to be done and the consent decree will give the school additional financial resources. Also, Lakeview's first principal is now deputy superintendent of the district. Since turning the school around has been made a district priority, it is probable that changes will be made at Lake-

view, but it is unclear what effect, if any, MGAP will have in shaping the school's future.

The disintegration of the change effort at Lakeview is especially disappointing in light of the energy and creativity that characterized its beginning. Initially, it seemed that the school, with leadership from the assessment team and the principal, would emerge from its troubled past. Instead, the best efforts of a core of concerned educators were defeated by teacher transfers that gutted the leadership of the change initiative and by a severe internal conflict that consumed the energies of the principal and the staff alike.

Case Study

Kensington School of Mathematics: An Exercise in Futility

Background

The School of Mathematics is a case study in how to fail with MGAP. The principal, Peter Henshaw, repeatedly emphasized his concern that the school's middle-level teachers lacked insight and understanding necessary to teach young adolescents. He claimed he saw MGAP as an effective way to "humanize the building" and improve teaching. However, from the selection of the team leaders until the termination of the assessment at Kensington, the principal's actions contradicted his voiced commitment to MGAP.

The Kensington School of Mathematics opened in January 1981 to ninth-grade students; grades six, seven, and eight were added the following fall. Students came to the magnet school from all over the city. They were divided into an upper house (grades 9–12) and a lower house (grades 6–8). About two-thirds of the 714 students were black, most of the others were white. Slightly more than half were eligible for free lunches. To attend the school, which emphasized math and science, students had to take an entrance exam. About three-quarters of the school's students scored in the average range on achievement tests; of the others, more scored above average than below. The school's 35 teachers, several of whom held doctorates, had the highest educational level of any school staff in the city.

Principal Undermines MGAP Process

Henshaw committed his school to MGAP early in the summer of 1983. Kim Penrod, an educational consultant, was to be the MGAP adviser at the school. Henshaw selected as team leaders Shannon Roe, the assistant principal in charge of the middle school, and Gail Maroney, the middle school counselor. Despite Penrod's careful briefing about the amount of work required of the MGAP team leaders, Henshaw did not relieve Roe or Maroney of any of their numerous duties in order to make time for MGAP. Roe saw MGAP as an important project but

realized it would require much more time than she could give. Although she knew she could not handle another major responsibility, she felt that she had no choice in the matter once Henshaw made the assignment.

Roe and Maroney realized that if MGAP was to be a success at Kensington, they needed to work with Henshaw in carefully selecting and preparing assessment team members. Their requests to Henshaw to inform the staff about the purpose of the assessment and to give advance notice to team members were not heeded. A week prior to the training of the assessment team, no one who subsequently served on the team had been notified, prepared, or given MGAP materials. Team members were drafted through memos they received in their mail boxes and consequently arrived at the training session angry and frustrated about their suddenly added responsibilities. They had no notion of what MGAP was, why it was being done, or what their roles would be.

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The training of the team took place in the building during the school day, with inadequate coverage for the classes of teachers on the team and only sporadic coverage for Roe and Maroney, which they had to arrange themselves. As a result, the teachers were constantly distracted by pressing classroom problems. Henshaw spent very little time with the team and never verbalized his reasons for agreeing to conduct an MGAP assessment beyond saying that "this is a very important project." Penrod conducted the training and subsequently acted as the monitor and consultant for the assessment team. She spent much of the training defusing team members' emotions, keeping their attention, and dealing with past history and power issues internal to the school. At the conclusion of the training, Penrod felt that she had begun to "hook" people on MGAP and to build a cohesive team, but to accomplish these tasks effectively would require another three unavailable days of training.

Penrod and the team decided that before the observations and interviews could begin, the entire staff would have to be informed about the assessment. They decided that Roe should make the presentation to the faculty. By mid-November, when the faculty meeting took place, several team members had become quite interested in and fairly optimistic about MGAP. At lunchtime on the day of the meeting, Henshaw informed Roe that she was to be at a district-level meeting that afternoon. Demoralized, but determined to forge ahead, Penrod, Roe, and Maroney decided that Penrod should make the presentation to the faculty. Faculty response was lukewarm, but still somewhat better than the negative reaction the team had expected.

Lack of Time for Observations and Interviews

The observations and interviews began, again with no released time for Roe, Maroney, or the team members. Penrod observed that Henshaw's refusal to arrange released time made them feel that they were unreasonable to expect substitutes and that they should somehow be able to juggle classroom teaching and assessment team responsibilities. Completing the observations and interviews was a long and frustrating process, because, as Penrod summarized, "there was no time provided for any team activities other than what could be begged, borrowed, or stolen." The data gathering was finally completed in March, taking twice as long as any other MGAP pilot school. Penrod, a veteran MGAP consultant and team leader, observed that in other schools the MGAP process had stimulated improved communication among school staff, but MGAP did not help solve communication problems at Kensington "due to the laborious nature of getting it done."

Completing the observations and interviews was a long and frustrating process, because . . .'there was no time provided for any team activities other than what could be begged, borrowed, or stolen."

Repeated attempts by Penrod to schedule the sharing and summarizing sessions failed. Henshaw offered no support; Roe and Maroney were too overwhelmed and frustrated to continue. Beginning in January, Penrod, having recognized the insurmountable odds Roe and

Maroney faced, suggested that they terminate the project, thereby offering them a graceful way out of MGAP. Both team leaders and the team members rejected the offer because, according to Penrod, they felt they would be accused of having failed to carry out an assignment if MGAP was not completed. No progress was made, however, and in mid-March, Penrod wrote a memo to Henshaw terminating her involvement in the assessment but offering help if the school wanted to complete MGAP at some time in the future. As Penrod expected, she never again heard from Henshaw or the team leaders. Unfortunately, it is possible that MGAP added strain, increased resistance, and taught only negative lessons about the possibility of change at Kensington.

Chapter 3

Lessons for Improving Middle-Grade Schools

Several practical lessons learned from the 11 pilot schools' MGAP experiences illuminate our understanding of how schools change, and in particular, how middle-grade schools initiate and react to efforts toward school improvement. This chapter describes the types of improvements schools target for themselves, providing insight into the substantive changes that can be wrought at the middle-grade level. In addition, the experiences with the MGAP pilot schools indicate eight important lessons about the process of school improvement.

Perhaps the most powerful and lasting effect of MGAP in these pilot cases is the new thoughtfulness it created in the schools and their staffs about what makes a school successful with young adolescents. In adopting the MGAP framework, these schools began to see that academic effectiveness and developmental responsiveness are mutually enhancing, achievable goals. MGAP led the schools to look at the needs of students, which is a perspective that receives much "lip service" but little careful attention in most schools and school districts.

For instance, discipline is a perennial concern in schools – especially junior high and middle schools – and these schools were no exception. However, discussions about discipline in these schools were dramatically altered when MGAP helped the staff shift from complaining about offensive behaviors to shaping school philosophy and planning strategies to meet students' needs for structure, clear limits, consistent expectations, recognition, and appropriate participation. Action became intentional; school practices emerged from an understanding of the needs of early adolescent students rather than from reasons of expediency or long-standing tradition. This intentionality is critical to both the substance and the process of school improvement.

Types of Improvements Schools Target for Themselves

Serendipitous Changes

Although each of the 11 schools described in the previous chapter developed its own agenda for improvement, there was a pattern to the sequence of changes in the schools. First, the serendipitous changes that occurred in the schools in the beginning stages of MGAP were a pleasant surprise. Training an assessment team, conducting observations and interviews, and planning for improvement usually produced welcome, unanticipated results. For example, administrators at McKinley and Howard Daly observed more positive interaction between teachers and students both inside and outside of classrooms. Furthermore, statistics from McKinley indicated a drop in the number of students referred to the principal's office due to behavior problems. As assessment team members studied research that helped them better understand their students, they were better able to handle and prevent behavior problems.

Also, in two ways the observation and interview questions heightened teachers' awareness of specific steps they could take immediately to improve pedagogy and classroom climate. First, there was a visible increase in the sharing of effective teaching methods and materials; prior to the MGAP assessment, most teachers rarely had the opportunity to observe and learn from each other. Second, many teachers reported experiences similar to that of the English teacher at Patrick Henry who, acting on her new awareness of young adolescents' need for self-exploration and self-definition, began to personalize writing assignments to help students express their own experiences and feelings. Although important in and of themselves, these unexpected, concrete bonuses also gave early encouragement to the assessment and improvement efforts.

School Climate and Instruction

Once the assessment was completed and recommendations were formulated, all the schools chose first to address issues related to school climate. Most of the schools focused their early improvement efforts on clarifying and

consistently enforcing school rules, recognizing and rewarding positive behavior and academic gains, improving the social and instructional relationships between teachers and students, and increasing opportunities for students to make meaningful contributions to the life of the school. For these schools, improving climate for both students and staff was an essential prerequisite to tackling harder, more guarded issues related to curriculum and instruction. MGAP helped them take the initial steps toward understanding their students and creating an environment that both challenges students and staff to excel and supports their efforts to achieve. The participatory assessment/planning process, coupled with tangible improvements in school climate, established a process and direction for further school improvement and created a "can do" attitude among staff.

Several of the schools made the leap from improving school climate to strengthening instruction. For instance, McKinley successfully instituted a diagnostic testing and individualized instruction program that yielded improved student mastery of basic skills. Patrick Henry began interdisciplinary team teaching on an experimental basis, then extended it throughout the school. Lakeview had decided to evaluate and revise its curriculum in each academic area, but the improvement process was overcome by severe personnel problems. Carlton initiated a school-wide emphasis on reading, and as the focus on improvement and high standards intensified, ineffective, recalcitrant teachers grew so uncomfortable that they left the school voluntarily.

While the schools were remarkably consistent in their efforts to improve school climate, their attempts to strengthen curricula and instruction were highly individualistic. The schools seemed to select their curricular and instructional improvement goals in response to the philosophy and vision of the principal and district- or state-level mandates, such as improving student performance on basic skills tests or reorganizing grade structures. In making these changes, the individual schools effectively expressed their uniqueness and creativity.

Reallocating Existing Resources

Much to the surprise of some administrators in the 11 schools, many improvements identified through the assess-

ment process did not require infusions of new funding. Instead, they required changing current modes of behavior or reallocating existing resources of time, personnel, and sometimes money. Reports from the schools are replete with substantive school improvements that sprang not from additional funds, but from a new mindset among staff, who felt responsible for evaluating and adapting school practices in the light of young adolescent students' academic and developmental needs.

While making these changes required time to plan and a willingness on the part of staff to change attitudes and behaviors, some were easily and quickly implemented. Examples of such efforts could be seen in schools' clarifying school philosophy and behavior expectations, eliminating unnecessary interruptions of classroom instruction, opening up the library for student use, and mounting a concerted effort to reward achievement and positive student behavior. More complex changes, such as instituting team teaching, developing teacher-based guidance programs, implementing alternatives to suspending students, and strengthening the instructional leadership role of administrators, could be undertaken because the schools had control – and perceived that they had control – over the necessary resources. In addition, these innovations were consistent with existing school and district policies, or with the principal's interpretation of those policies.

Other organizational, curricular, and instructional changes sought by the schools required extensive political and fiscal groundwork outside the school before they could become reality. Often, these more sweeping changes required a commitment of additional funds by the school district. Two examples of such goals come from Morgan Middle School – providing daily planning time for an overworked teaching staff and expanding the school's overcrowded physical plant. At Morgan, as well as at some of the other schools, politically astute principals used the facts about their schools and the research background gained through MGAP to convince central office administrators, school board members, and the community of the need for major changes.

Linkages to District and State Mandates

Other school improvement goals were inextricably linked to district or state mandates. At Prescott, Northwest, Newman, and Patrick Henry, many of the planned innovations came either in response to or in anticipation of their districts' tentative plans to convert junior high schools into middle schools. Although the state legislature's Education Improvement Act took effect after McKinley's assessment team presented its initial recommendations, the faculty and administrators used what they had learned from MGAP to give shape and substance to their response to the new state mandates. The assessment team leader at Ellis Bay crafted a marriage between the MGAP assessment criteria and the state's newly mandated teacher-evaluation instrument, helping teachers to comprehend the importance of the MGAP team's recommended changes and the rationale behind some of the criteria by which they would be evaluated.

This intentional linkage between MGAP, a voluntary self-assessment and planning process, and mandated changes was successful at several of the schools for three reasons. First, in an attempt to bring coherence to the array of internal and external forces that operate on a school, the principal or team leader pursued connections among projects and activities related to various mandates. Second, MGAP's conceptual framework – that schools for young adolescents can and should be both academically effective and developmentally responsive – is compatible with mandates given to schools. And third, while serving on the MGAP assessment team, teachers and principals developed knowledge about their students and skills for working collegially that were easily applied to other projects. At a time when increasing numbers of directives are coming to schools from the state level, it is good news that, given thoughtful, creative leadership and a coherent approach to school improvement, state mandates can be linked with reform initiatives at the building level.

Staff Development

The development of new knowledge, skills, attitudes, and practices in individual teachers and principals represented an important and often potent change in the schools. Many teachers who acted as team members

reported, "MGAP is the best in-service training in which I have ever participated." Teachers and principals cited several ways in which their participation in the assessment enriched their work, emphasizing that the MGAP materials helped them make the difficult and elusive connection between research and everyday school practices. At McKinley and Patrick Henry, where the teachers had been trained to teach in secondary schools, the materials helped them understand why and how middle school students are so different from high school students. This understanding quickly translated into fewer discipline problems as well as a host of developmentally appropriate activities designed to recognize and encourage productive, helpful student behavior. Also, the principals and team leaders at Howard Daly and Prescott expressed an often-heard refrain when they observed that MGAP helped them recognize the cumulative effect seemingly disparate everyday school experiences have on student attitudes and learning.

Additionally, MGAP gave teachers a structured way to learn from each other and to obtain a view of the school beyond their individual classrooms. Because most teachers spend the majority of their time in classrooms, they often feel isolated and detached from overall school life. The self-assessment gave teachers—often for the first time—a formal, positively-sanctioned process for talking with students, parents, and colleagues about critical issues affecting their schools. These discussions provided insights into how others perceived the school and ideas about how problems could be addressed. Another bonus was that, when they were assigned to observe in classrooms, team members saw teaching techniques that they later requested be shared with other teachers.

Finally, MGAP enriched and expanded individual teachers' professional lives by giving them opportunities to participate in setting priorities for their schools. Involvement in school assessment and planning increased their sense of responsibility, efficacy, and commitment to improve the school. MGAP engaged teachers in collegial decision making and showed them the potential for working and planning together. By the time they completed their assessments, teachers had gained specific skills in group planning. Every school's assessment report recommended that the faculty spend more time together to plan and coordinate teaching, discipline policies, and other school

improvement efforts. Many teachers cared deeply about their schools, and were willing to give their time – both paid and unpaid – to work for school improvement, so long as they saw that the process was relevant to their daily experiences and likely to produce constructive change.

Practical Lessons for Educational Leaders

In addition to providing insight into the substance of improvement in middle-grade schools, the 11 pilot schools' experiences offer eight practical lessons for educational leaders. These lessons relate to leadership for change; roles for parents, citizens, and outside consultants in educational improvement; and self-assessment as a springboard to change.

1. Self-assessment and school improvement must begin with a clear statement of goals and responsibilities.

Without clarity of purpose and roles, confusion and misunderstanding can eventually derail a school improvement effort. The instigator, usually the principal, should offer an official statement of purpose that includes an honest statement of the precipitating need for assessment, such as the arrival of a new principal, an anticipated shift in grade configuration, a poor reputation within the community, or a general desire to take stock of and improve the school. This statement should also delineate how the assessment findings will be used to plan change. It then becomes the principal's responsibility to ensure that the goals of the official statement are met. This is a particularly important responsibility because, as Parish and Aquila point out, "Change is largely a political process" (*1983, 35*). How the administrator announces and supports new programs sends a message to teachers about the political context, i.e., about how important the change is.

In a similar manner, roles and responsibilities with respect to the assessment should be carefully defined. Especially important is clarity about who makes what decisions and who holds veto power over the implementation of recommendations. Few things will destroy staff and community support more quickly than having an administrator usurp control of a task or decision that staff

members had been told was their responsibility. Conversely, when administrators maintain the integrity of the school improvement effort by following through with established goals and procedures, they build esteem and confidence among staff. This in turn heightens the probability of smooth implementation of recommendations.

2. The principal plays a crucial role in the change process at the building level.

This finding is repeated consistently in educational change and school effectiveness research. Principals are pivotal to change, first of all, because they control access to the school and wield powerful influence over the adoption of innovations. In every MGAP school, the principal initiated and originally threw support behind MGAP. In the aborted effort at Kensington, the principal undermined the process. After the assessment, the principals ultimately established recommendations to be implemented, developing incentives, time lines, and accountability measures for meeting them. In the schools that used MGAP successfully, the principals communicated the message, "This is important and deserves our best effort," through public and behind-the-scenes acts of support and by holding the staff accountable for following through on plans.

Principals also decide how much control they are willing to share. Confident principals encourage honest scrutiny and share responsibility in their schools. Their personal security often springs from a clear vision of what the school can and should be. They understand the learning environment young adolescents require in order to succeed. Although they were authoritative in declaring a direction for their schools and in defining the expected level of participation in school improvements, the pilot school principals were not dictators. Instead, they clearly defined leadership roles and responsibilities for their staffs, then acted (and expected others to act) in accordance with that definition.

Effective principals are also creative in managing resources. They juggle time, energy, talent, and money to maintain daily school operations while planning and implementing school improvements. They are ingenious in devising ways to channel resources most productively; they are entrepreneurs in the best sense of the word. It becomes

clear through the MGAP studies that time and energy – not always money – are the most precious commodities. Tight budgets are a reality to be dealt with, not an excuse for inaction.

3. School administrators who are adept at guiding a school through planned change are rare.

Given the critical nature of the principal's role, this observation is perhaps one of the most disturbing lessons for schools and educators. For the most part, principals and district-level administrators in the 11 MGAP pilot schools did not seem to grasp the overall picture of how organizations function and how they change.

Two failings were most striking. First, some of the principals in the 11 MGAP pilot schools failed to realize that MGAP, which is explicitly presented as a process to foster consensus and support for change among staff, would produce practical recommendations, heightened expectations for change, and challenges to the status quo. Self-assessment, as conceived in MGAP, is not a benign process. Principals should know that once an organization is mobilized for change and there is broad ownership of and support for that change, frustration, a sense of helplessness, and skepticism about any future change efforts will occur if the principal halts implementation. Only three of the pilot school principals anticipated this momentum for change and capitalized on it as much as possible. Most were surprised by the intensity of the momentum and frequently mis-managed the change process.

Secondly, the principals generally paid too little attention to institutionalizing innovations after they were implemented. Berman defines institutionalization as the stabilizing of change within an organization (*1981*). Miles concludes:

"...the enthusiasm, skill, and effectiveness of the innovator are insufficient conditions for institutionalization. Rather, what seems required is strong attention of administrators to stabilizing and supporting the innovation, extending its use to a large group, and making provisions to protect the innovation against the threats of personnel turnover that are endemic in schools" (1983, 19).

One aspect of administrative short-sightedness was the tendency of principals and district administrators to be project-oriented. Innovations were considered as cellular, without connection to or integration with other school efforts. This tendency does not seem to be unique to these 11 schools; it is common for schools to embark on new projects before they have consolidated gains from previous projects. Long-term impact is minimal because:

- since there is little accountability to superiors and peers for either individual actions or project outcomes, there is little follow-through on plans;
- the changes in organizational structure, roles, and procedures that are necessary to stabilize the innovation are not made; and
- the knowledge gained is not generalized to other projects or to school-wide efforts.

Administrators' lack of understanding about organizational structure and behavior often truncates the potentially far-reaching benefits of many projects. To regard projects as discrete units is to fail to meld them into a coherent whole. In the three MGAP schools where the prognosis for long-range impact is hopeful, principals tapped the human energy created by MGAP, paid particular attention to stabilizing changes, and were effective in linking MGAP with other projects in their schools. These principals continually and intentionally intertwined their vision for their schools with tools like MGAP and externally-mandated projects in an attempt to bring direction and coherence to their (and their staffs') work.

4. Teachers have vital roles to play in providing leadership for school improvement.

MGAP powerfully influences collegial learning, planning, and action. In nine of the pilot schools, one or two teachers played critical leadership roles in the assessment process. While these teachers were recognized as informal leaders in their schools and had served on committees and self-study task forces, few had ever led, or even participated in, a serious school-based improvement effort. Their testimony about how the MGAP experience enriched their teaching, and their new sense of efficacy point to the importance of leadership development opportunities for teachers.

Repeatedly, studies of teachers' job satisfaction indicate working conditions that isolate and disenfranchise teachers are major contributors to dissatisfaction that leads to attrition (*Rosenholtz 1985*). Any successful plan to attract and retain the best teachers must foster teachers' meaningful participation in and responsibility for school-wide planning and decision making.

5. While principals and teachers are key figures in school improvement efforts at the building level, they are motivated by the actions of their superiors.

When district-level administrators reward (or at least, do not punish) personal initiative, self-scrutiny, participatory management, honest appraisal of strengths and weaknesses, and building-level innovations, principals and teachers are more likely to implement successfully an assessment and improvement process like MGAP. Many principals know from experience that the absence of support from their district's central office not only can quickly defeat school improvement initiatives but also can place them in professional jeopardy. Only the most secure, talented, and dedicated principal could guide a successful school improvement campaign without visible signs of district support. One of the most exciting aspects of tracking the MGAP schools has been watching a few such principals work.

6. Schools are capable of assessing and improving themselves.

In this age of outside experts and consultants, MGAP verifies the expertise of a school's own faculty, staff and community. In fact, if assessment is to serve as a springboard to change, a self-assessment has distinct advantages over an assessment entrusted to outside evaluators. Although engaging evaluators relieves faculty of additional time-consuming duties, it also deprives them of the benefits of learning and participation. Staff members gain from the process as well as from the results of self-assessment; they become accustomed to collegial exchange and committed to the recommendations they have helped shape. An invaluable lesson from MGAP is that self-assessment can also be a powerful and practical learning experience for teachers.

In this scenario, assessment serves three functions – producing a data base for planning, mobilizing the school for change, and providing staff development for teachers. Consultants and trainers may prove valuable in solving specific school problems, but they must not usurp ownership of the school improvement initiative. The MGAP case studies are evidence that school staffs – some with little or no help from consultants – can do an excellent job in assessing their schools; their assessments are critical and honest. If anything, the assessment teams tended to overlook their strengths rather than whitewash their weaknesses. The case studies affirmed the competence of school staff to evaluate their schools and to plan improvements that could be subsequently implemented.

7. Parents and citizens can make objective, constructive, well-informed contributions to an assessment.

The involvement of parents in MGAP is especially noteworthy because it engages them at a time in their children's lives when parental involvement in school typically declines. When children reach early adolescence, they no longer thrill at the presence of their parents at school, and parents often pull back from volunteering their services. MGAP provides a means for parents to participate in building-level planning; they can serve on the MGAP assessment team or they can participate in the parent interviews.

Half of the MGAP schools included at least one parent on their assessment teams, with varying degrees of success. The most effective inclusion of parents was predicated on a more general commitment to citizen participation in decision making and a willingness to accommodate parents and citizens logistically. In the broader context of ongoing school improvement, parents and citizens who serve on planning teams can fulfill three significant functions:

- to challenge broadly-held social expectations that reinforce the status quo in education;
- to mitigate negative public criticism of the school; and
- to improve the substance and viability of a school improvement plan (*Joyce et al. 1983*).

Although the pilot schools did not focus on securing meaningful citizen participation in setting goals for school

improvement, they made tentative efforts to solicit parents' opinions. The response of both educators and parents to the MGAP parent interviews illustrates how the MGAP process forced all the schools to confront parent involvement issues. Parents who were interviewed consistently expressed surprise and gratitude that they were asked for their opinions and suggestions. The fact that principals and teachers were surprised both by this sentiment and by the content of what parents had to say is testimony to the fact that they seldom ask parents what they think.

8. The energy level for school improvement ebbs and flows over time.

In the MGAP schools, following the initial round of activity that produced immediate changes in school climate, the momentum for change subsided among all but a few assessment team members. These people, who frequently were acknowledged as leaders in the school, held a vision of what the school could become and had some understanding of the incremental steps required to achieve that vision. To varying degrees, they realized that a period of equilibrium serves the purpose of providing time for refining and institutionalizing changes and for establishing accountability for school improvement activities.

The planning and lobbying required to turn long-range plans into real school improvement are seldom exciting enough to keep large numbers of staff involved. The task of consolidating gains and reviving the momentum for change rests primarily with the principal, assisted by a core group of staff members. Their leadership and command of resources put them in a position to channel school energy into efforts that transcend creating a more positive school climate to improving curriculum and instruction. At this stage, consultants can be employed to rekindle energy, legitimize an innovation, or provide specific "how to" training.

Criteria for Success with MGAP

These eight lessons point to the conclusion that schools must meet some minimal criteria in order for MGAP to be a productive use of staff time and effort. First, district and building-level administrators must accept the MGAP

premise that safety, academic effectiveness, and developmental responsiveness are reasonable expectations for middle-grade schools. Second, the school principal must be receptive to critical scrutiny of the entire school and prepared for the intense momentum for change that may ensue. Third, leadership for the assessment, be it from the principal or faculty, must be clearly defined, acknowledged, and accepted. Fourth, the principal and faculty must be at least slightly concerned about current school climate, curriculum, and instruction and exhibit a reasonable degree of openness to change. Fifth, the school cannot be completely ineffective or out of control; minimal conditions of safety and order must be present, and there must be some evidence of faculty and administration competence and efficacy. Finally, there should be some guarantee that improvement efforts will not be undermined by building- or district-level administrators; in other words, the prognosis for actually using the assessment findings should be good.

MGAP is a participatory, powerful, but labor-intensive tool for building-level school improvement. Time and energy are precious commodities in schools. The benefits of a process like MGAP will probably outweigh its costs in terms of personnel time only if it is conceived and conducted as a comprehensive school improvement process, rather than simply as an assessment. Schools should consider the following questions when deciding whether to use MGAP as a tool for school improvement:

- Do we agree with the MGAP philosophy and information base enough to use this instrument as our guide for planning the future direction of our school?
- Do we want to conduct a self-assessment using a participatory process that produces a momentum for change among staff? Can the principal comfortably and capably support a process that meaningfully involves staff and perhaps parents and other community members in making decisions about school improvement? Does district policy and practice support school-based decision making and initiatives?
- Are the required time, energy, and resources available to conduct a successful assessment, planning, and improvement process?
- Is the prognosis good for actually using the assessment findings to improve the school?

If a school answers "yes" to these questions, MGAP has the potential to help it make itself more responsive to young adolescents' academic and developmental needs.

Conclusion

It is appropriate to end this monograph as it began —with a focus on the young people who populate middle-grade schools. At a time in life marked by dramatic physical changes, expanding cognitive abilities, and intense personal relationships, young adolescents are uniquely vulnerable to both the best and the worst in their schools. Perhaps the best wish for young adolescents and the challenge for their schools is eloquently expressed by Bruce Joyce:

"It is difficult indeed for a society to create an educational system that deliberately pushes the young to generate unfamiliar ideas and institutions, and even more difficult to give children and adolescents the freedom to do something about those yet unborn notions. To do so requires a trust in the growing young, a belief that the evolving men and women will choose the best of their ideas" (1983, 10).

Before we can trust the young, we must understand them. On the basis of understanding and trust, then, we can define a vision for what their schools should be and work to make that vision become a reality.

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The Center for Early Adolescence works to increase the effectiveness of individuals and agencies that have an impact upon the lives of 10- to 15-year-olds. Early adolescence is a time of great physical, social, and emotional growth – a time when young people are highly vulnerable to both the positive and negative influences that their schools, families, and communities can exert. To help policymakers and service providers understand this important period of growth and change, the Center serves as a clearinghouse for information on the age group, trains professionals and volunteers to work with young adolescents, and provides a variety of other services designed to improve the status of 10- to 15-year-olds in today's society. The Center focuses upon school improvement, parenting, and responsive community services for young people.